

New Orleans docks at Longboat

By Cindy Lane

SUN STAFF WRITER
clane@amisun.com

LONGBOAT KEY – You can almost smell the magnolias, feel the warm breeze off the Mississippi and taste the mimosas as authentic New Orleans jazz fills the Longboat Key Education Center on Thursday nights.

The music is ageless, and so are the octogenarians who play weekly concerts to a smiling, humming, packed house.

The Original Octogenarian New Orleans Jazz Orchestra, known to their fans as “OONOJO,” make listeners tap their toes to “All of Me,” “Tiger Rag” and other well-known tunes; the only thing lacking is a dance floor.

Reed player Dr. Henry Blackburn pulls off Benny Goodman’s clarinet licks at the end of several songs and captures the sound of Johnny Hodges’ signature sax.

“Anybody can play the notes, but he’s got the sound,” keyboard player Bob Greene says of his bandmate.

Greene is impressive on the difficult “tiger growl,” played repeatedly with the left elbow on “Tiger Rag,” and bandleader and drummer Stan Levine’s wire brushes recall some athletic Gene Krupa moments.

Young bassist Joe Porter laid down a solid foundation for the senior swingers at their first weekly concert last month.

“I’ve played New Orleans jazz before, but never with anyone who knew what they were doing



SUN PHOTOS/CINDY LANE

Above, Left, bandleader and drummer Stan Levine of the Original Octogenarian New Orleans Jazz Orchestra (OONOJO) and ivory tickler Bob Greene entertain weekly at the Longboat Key Education Center. Right, Bob Greene’s fingers fly across the piano during his version of “Tiger Rag.”

like this,” said Porter, who was teased about being up past his bedtime by band members.

The band gives miniature lessons and personal reminiscences about jazz in between numbers, tipping their hat to the mission of the Longboat Key Education Center.

Rubbing elbows with famous jazz musicians is a common thread among the group’s members.

Greene, a snowbird, recalls that his dentist in New York once made an appointment right next to Benny Goodman’s to give Greene a chance to possibly meet the bandleader. Goodman left a piece of gum behind in an ashtray, and Greene managed to snag it, keeping it for a decade with Goodman’s teeth marks intact. Years later, he ran into Good-



man and mentioned the incident. Instead of chuckling as expected, the chronically crotchety Goodman responded, “Lousy dentist,” Greene laughs.

A former radio documentary writer, Greene toured and recorded with original members of Jelly Roll Morton’s band and has performed at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center in New York, Preservation Hall in New Orleans and London’s Royal Festival Hall.

Blackburn, a Minneapolis and Anna Maria Island resident famous for his cholesterol research at the Mayo Clinic, is a Bradenton native who took music lessons at the Bradenton Woman’s Club as a child. He picked up his love for jazz in New Orleans, where he attended medical school, and is a veteran of Preservation Hall. He also played in Paris with European jazz pioneers, and once accompanied exotic fan dancer Sally Rand.

Levine, a Marine Corps and Peace Corps veteran and former television network newswriter and promotion and advertising

executive for RCA, discovered jazz in Paris while studying at the Sorbonne on the G.I. Bill. He led the Southampton Dixie, Racing and Clambake Society Jazz Band, the Original Traditional Jazz Band and Jazz Hot Ensemble, all in New York, and the Early American Jazz Band in Maine. His groups featured jazz greats including Jimmy MacPartland, Roy Eldridge, Coleman Hawkins, Cozy Cole and Woody Allen, and he has performed at the Newport, Manassas and Montreaux jazz festivals. He is a Tide Well Hospice patient living in Bradenton Beach who intends to go out swinging.

Guest artists who have been invited to sit in with the band include Barry Bachus on bass, Gerry Addicott on banjo and Fred Dinse on bass and tuba.

The Thursday concerts are from 8 to 10 p.m. at the Longboat Key Education Center, 5370 Gulf of Mexico Drive on Longboat Key. Admission is \$10. For reservations, call Levine at 778-4333.



From left, Henry Blackburn on clarinet, bassist Joe Porter, drummer Stan Levine and pianist Bob Greene played New Orleans jazz at the Longboat Key Education Center at their first weekly concert last month.

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