



Concerts at Moraga Commons Park
Thursday evenings, 6:30pm – 8:30pm
The snack bar opens at 6:00 pm.

Rossmoor Big Band and Generations in Jazz open Moraga

Concert Series *Break out your dancing shoes!*

By Sophie Braccini

There is no better term than “Generations in Jazz” to portray the mix of musicians involved in the Rossmoor Big Band. For 10 years now, the Rossmoor players, some in their 80’s, have invited middle and high school students to join them on stage. The result is the only Stage Big Band in California (a Big Band plus strings, clarinets and flutes) with the energy and creativity to attract people from the whole Bay Area and beyond.

On May 23rd, it was this band that got couples of all ages up off their feet, to dance the night away at the Lafayette Veterans’ Hall. On June 6th, they open the Moraga Summer Concert series and even if the dance floor is not as good at the Commons, there’s no doubt many will dance that night, too.

“It is very difficult to source a big band/stage band with all the instruments including vocals,” says Maurice “Mo” Levich, the band director (also of Lafayette’s Generations in Jazz Foundation), “so ten years ago we contacted Bob Athayde, director of music education at Stanley Middle School, and tried to incorporate our first young musicians.” Mo remembers that there were many questions at the time; would older musicians be flexible enough to accept the young ones, would the students be interested in Big Band music, could they work together?

It was an immediate success. “Bob send us 8th grader Jeff Kolhede, with his tenor sax,” re-

members Mo, “he is humble and was accepted immediately by the seniors.” Kolhede is now a student at Cal State Northridge majoring in Music industry, “I remember not knowing much about the music of the 40s and 50s when I started with them. Now those tunes are engraved in my head,” remembers the student. “I had so much fun playing with them, they were so nice to me.” The young man was a WWII buff, and he enjoyed hearing the stories of the veterans from that area that are playing in the band. “I have a tremendous respect for everyone,” remembers Kolhede.

Over the years, the band has greeted many young musicians. At this time, seven of the band’s forty one musicians are students. “There is no place I’d rather be on Wednesday evening than at the rehearsal,” says Campolindo Sophomore Sammy Barton. “It’s fun to work with the older musicians, they are the original jazzers, they know how it should be played; it’s very inspiring.” The young alto saxophone player feels that the musicians are extremely encouraging and not too demanding. He believes that he will transmit what he is receiving from the band and will teach music later in life.

What is the secret of getting a level of music technicality that will fit the younger students, the more experienced ones and create a harmony that sounds so darn good? That secret is the big band’s covert weapon: Frank Como, a Rossmoor resident who was the top arranger for

Lionel Hampton for twenty years in New York City.

“We are so fortunate that Frank writes for us,” says Levich, “he or-

chestrates and arranges our pieces with fitness, creating specific pieces to get every musician to shine.” Como, who plays with the Bay Area Big Band as well, gets a lot of satisfaction working with the younger musicians. “I get a big kick out of this,” says the older professional, “I am retired and this is a great musical outlet for me. I wanted to pass on that wonderful music to the next generation, and the kids are so enthusiastic and they work so hard! The band gives them an opportunity to be featured and it’s a pleasure to write specific pieces to highlight their specific talents.”

June

- 5 Rossmoor Big Band Swing
- 12 Stone Soup Rock and Roll
- 19 Motor Dude Zydeco Cajun
- 26 HouseRockers Rock and Roll

July

- 4 Larry Lynch & the Mob Rock and Roll
- 10 Boothill Country & Western
- 17 Dave Crimmen Rockabilly
- 24 Lacye Baker & the Black Diamond Band

Soul, R & B

- 31 Dave Russell Band Country & Western

August

- 7 littledog2 Rock and Roll
- 14 Madison Blues Band Blues
- 21 La Ventana Latin