

Feeling the Music

Written by Wendy Nilsen Pollitzer
Tuesday, 04 December 2012 12:08



My Visit to the Jazz Corner



The Jazz Corner. For this Beaufortonian, it's been a hidden treasure. For most islanders on Hilton Head, it's a venue they wish was still a secret. But it's no secret anymore. It's a world-wide phenomenon and one of the top jazz clubs in the country.

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Martin McFie and Lydia Inglett recently invited me to the cozy club, located in the Village at Wexford, and I was filled with awe from the moment I stepped in the door of this revered establishment, greeted by the charming Amy O'Leary. The Jazz Corner is a modern day return to the Jazz and Swing Eras, and for my generation, a place to enjoy live music and fully appreciate this charismatic part of American culture.

I'm no musician, but I understand good music when I hear and feel it. Accomplished performers have



the ability to make your feet tap, your mind fantasize and your whole body move to the melody. You can close your eyes and fall back in time or spring forward to your future dreams. Good music creates an experience that yields intrinsic resolve, whether the vibe initiates feelings of joy or pain, happiness or sadness and whether the jazz is swing, hard bop, bebop, Dixieland, smooth, progressive or acid. Jazz isn't only heard, it is also felt. It comes from the heart.

And the Jazz Corner, managed by Kelli Lesch, produces these experiences every night of the

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week! That's right, we have a place in our own back yard that invites local, regional and internationally acclaimed musicians to play seven nights a week, a place that welcomes its patrons to have uninhibited fun and create memories for a lifetime. Lesch and her piano-playing husband, Martin, are driving forces that have helped shape the authentic nightclub atmosphere.

The Jazz Corner was founded by Bob Masteller in 1999. Masteller and his wife Lois moved their family and their collective jazz history to Hilton Head in 1974 when Bob accepted the position as Vice President of Sea Pines Development with Charles Fraser. As the island grew, Masteller saw the potential for a great jazz club with live music and fine dining. And so, one of the top jazz clubs in the country was born.

I met Bob and Lois Masteller at the Jazz Corner earlier this month, and their hospitality was consummate, their verve contagious and their commitment to an art form unwavering.

Masteller, on horns and the vibraphone, performed with his son, David on stand-up base, Billy Hoffman on drums and the great Bill Peterson from Chicago on piano. The songstress Gina Rene´ from Savannah, donning baubles, bangles and beads, belted melodies as she talked her way in and out of songs. They elegantly played beautifully titled standards, *East of the Sun*, *Polka Dots and Moonbeams* and *Satin Doll*

in a full rich sound. The flugelbone, the muted trumpet, the vibraphone and the piano were deft and inventive, while the base behind played q

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quiet solos, and the drums carried the beat.

Masteller learned the vibraphone, also known as the vibraharp or simply the vibes, from his father, who was one of the first vibraphone players in America.

“My Jazz life was gifted to me by my father, Harold F. Masteller. He was born in 1900 and fronted a hot music band at the apex of the Jazz Age. In the Swing era, he led a Big Band, playing hot fiddle violin. Classically trained, he attacked his music with passion...” explained Masteller.

In the 1980's, Bob Masteller headed up various groups with different styles, including New Orleans, straight ahead jazz and mood music. He has appeared at virtually every mainstream location for swing and jazz in the Lowcountry, including all major hotels, Hannah's East, The Golden Rose, Self Family Arts Center, USC Performing Arts Center and the Original Old Post Office on Pope Avenue. Included in the highlights of Bob's career, he has performed for Presidents Clinton, Ford and Bush and Senator Bobby Kennedy. Also in his background was a 26-week stint at Sweet Georgia Brown in Savannah during the key moments that went into the makeup of "The Garden of Good and Evil."

And now, with skills learned from playing in his father's Big Band and all of his experiences, Bob

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