



# IN THE MOOD

The Olney Big Band  
NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2009

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Dear Readers:

As we stand at the end of the new millenium's first decade, I am awed at how far the Olney Big Band has come.

From our inception in 2002, the OBB has moved boldly in a quest to share the love of Big Band music. In 2006 we released our first CD, and in 2007 were honored as the first recipients of the Ambassadors of Big Band Music certification. In 2008 we performed at the prestigious Montreux Jazz Festival, and in 2009 held the concert of a lifetime at the Olney Theatre Center as we honored Benny Goodman's centennial birthday.

Yet, our greatest triumphs are achieved when we invoke a nostalgic tear and nod of remembrance, or ignite a spark of curiosity. For it is then, that we truly fulfill our charter of promoting a living history of Big Band music.

May the spirit of the holidays find its way to your door, and fill your heart with love.

- ITM Editor

[www.olneybigband.org](http://www.olneybigband.org)

## Quarter Notes Musings Of A Band Leader

Dr. Rip G. Rice - Music Director, Olney Big Band

### December 13, 2009 – A Date That Marks A New Beginning

**T**he Olney Big Band is very pleased to have been invited to participate in a seminal musical event sponsored by the Potomac River Jazz Club, a 700-member non-profit society formed in 1971 to preserve and promote the playing and appreciation of traditional Dixieland jazz, a truly unique American art form. This is the music that originated among black musicians in New Orleans around the turn of the 20th century and migrated up the Mississippi River and eventually around the globe. It encompasses jazz in this classic form as well as its derivations of Chicago and San Francisco styles plus blues and ragtime music.

Dixieland music normally is played by small musical groups – from trios through septets. The “standard basic” Dixieland combo includes trumpet, trombone, clarinet, tuba, banjo, drums and piano, however variations include tenor sax, guitar, string bass, and other instruments. The uniqueness of playing such music, at least in the early days of this wonderful music, was that none of the players used any music. They just set up, looked at each other, decided on which number was to be played, in what key, and kicked it off.

Musical heroes of the PRJC are Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Bessie Smith, Bix Beiderbecke, Sidney Bechet, Jack Teagarden, James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, the West Coast revival stars including Lu Watters, Turk Murphy, Bob Scobey and all the other early jazz luminaries. The PRJC helped to found and is an active member of the American Federation of Jazz Societies. It is a founding member of the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington.

Big Band Jazz evolved during the 1920s and 1930s in America and is much more musically structured than is “traditional Dixieland” jazz. Big Bands are loosely defined as groups having 10 or more players (OBB normally fields 17 players, two vocalists and a director). Written arrangements normally are played (although some of the famous big bands included “head arrangements” – with no notes written on paper).

A big band arrangement can include basic melodies that are “jazzy” in nature by themselves. However, within the structure of the musically defined melody, instrumental solos are played at various points during the song, during which a counter-melody normally is created by the soloist on the spot, as in traditional jazz solos.

Over the years since its formation, the PRJC and its members have concentrated on performances of traditional jazz music. However, on December 13, 2009, the PRJC is holding a first-time Holiday Dixieland-Big Band Bash for your listening and dancing pleasure! Early in 2009, PRJC ran an article in the Tailgate (PRJC's excellent monthly newsletter) asking its members whether the focus of the PRJC should be expanded to include other aspects of jazz rather than just Dixieland-Traditional music and asked for comments. Most



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respondents were in favor of expanding PRJC's horizons to include other jazz elements such as Big Band music. As a result of this interest, the PRJC is hosting a combined Dixieland and Big Band event on December 13, 2009, featuring two bands -- The Dixieland Direct and the Olney Big Band.

The Dixieland Direct specializes in traditional New Orleans Dixieland music fashioned after the Swing and Dixieland styles of Benny Goodman and Pete Fountain. The band features Henning Hoehne on clarinet, Bob Boguslaw on piano and Mike Flaherty on drums. In addition to the core group of these three fine musicians, the group will be expanded for this special event to also include the fine musicianship of Brian Priebe on trombone, Dave Robinson on cornet, Rick Eldridge on banjo/guitar and Dallas Smith on bass. The Dixieland Direct provides its own original arrangements, plus many more from a collection from Scott Joplin's Rags, Louis Armstrong, Fats Waller, Duke Ellington and others.

The Olney Big Band (also a not-for-profit corporation) is truly honored to be the first big band invited to participate in this seminal PRJC musical event. Two musicians in the OBB (one 90, one 85) grew up during the Big Band Era of the 1930s to 1950s. Other OBB players range from their seventies down to high school age. Musical heroes of the OBB include Glenn Miller, Count Basie, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, Charlie Barnett, Woody Herman and scores of other big bands. Its musical library includes original charts from these big bands, along with more modern arrangements of songs of the Big Band Era. The OBB plays for concerts, dances, parties, and just for the fun of it all.

Members of the OBB are all proud of having been invited to participate in this event and are eager to help PRJC enter this new phase in their history which now includes Big Band Music. □

# A Proper Send Off

Intro by BRADLEY BAWEK

Our monthly swing dances at the Studio of Ballet Arts ended on a sour note on September 12, 2009. The dwindling attendance forced us to discontinue our grand experiment. Fortunately, a retired trombone player from Aspen Hill, MD would present us with the opportunity to close our doors in the proper fashion. What follows is a thank you letter from the daughter of our October Swingfest guest of honor.

October 10, 2009

Dear Rip:

No words can adequately express our gratitude to you and the entire Olney Big Band for making Dad's 90th birthday celebration (Oct. 3rd) so special. Dad had a smile on his face from the first note to the last. He usually shies away from being the center of attention, but your kind words were

just right, he enjoyed the spotlight! And when he held that trombone, he was transported back in time almost 70 years. He told me later that he imagined himself playing with your band. And Monday, his actual birthday (Oct. 5) we took a drive so he could listen to your CD, and the magic continued.

A few photos from the swingfest are enclosed. I hope the band finds another venue that draws larger crowds. I will keep my eyes on your website and try to come back when I can take Dad to another of your events. For now, please know that you touched many hearts with your music and your embrace of Dad. We will never forget his joy.

With appreciation from Dad,  
Amy, and especially me. □

Sharon Dorfman,  
Ormond Beach, FL.



Representing three generations of trombone players: Milt Dorfman, Rainar Manteuffel, and Christopher Koepke  
photo courtesy of Sharon Dorfman

# Nicknames of the Swing Era

by ROBERT REDDING

The private names jazz musicians give each other are often known to the public, but the reason behind the names is sometimes obscure. Some nicknames are invented by childhood friends and last a lifetime. The most common of these are descriptive, either making fun of a physical characteristic or a lack of it. Most nicknames apply to male musicians. The best known female vocalists are "Wee" Bonnie Baker and "Peggy" Lee.

Thomas "Fats" Waller was fat, "Shorty" Baker was short, "Chubby" Jackson was chubby, but "Tiny" Kahn was huge and "Pee Wee" Russell was tall. William Clayton's mother named him "Buck" because of his American Indian ancestry. Later his friends called him "Cat-Eye" because of his unusual blue-green eyes.

Barney Bigard was called "Creole" by musicians in Duke Ellington's band because of an incident on the road. Drummer Sonny Greer recalls a bus ride in the south after a job. The bandmen were on the way back to their Pullman car when they stopped at a greasy spoon to get something to eat. Duke sent Barney in to place the order because he looked practically white. He was in there a long time when the door finally banged open and Barney came out shouting, "I'm Creole! I'm Creole!" The band stayed hungry but Barney was known as "Creole" from then on.

"Smack" is a street name for heroin, but heroin had nothing to do with Fletcher Henderson's nickname. It was a name he picked up in school where it was said he made a smacking noise with his lips when he was sleeping. His school roommate was named Mack, so they became "Mack and Smack."

It is well known that Benny Goodman was called "The Ray" because

of the disapproving stare he focused on errant musicians, but his musicians called him various other names. At different times he was known as "B.G.", "The King", "The Ego", and "The Old Man", as well as "Pops" because Goodman himself called everybody else by that name. Drummer Dave Tough called him Benny "Badman" and for reasons known only to him, pianist Jess Stacy called him "Shirley Temple".

The most prominent jazz musician in the Washington, D.C. area who bears a nickname is "Rip" G. Rice, Director of the Olney Big Band

## 60 More Nicknames For Jazz Musicians

Nathaniel "Cannonball" Adderly  
Henry "Red" Allen  
Herman "Trigger" Alpert  
Louis "Pops" Armstrong (also "Satchmo" -- for "Satchelmouth")  
William C. "Buster" Bailey  
Bill "Count" Basie  
Leon "Bix" Bismarck Beiderbecke  
Gordon "Tex" Beneke  
Rowland Bernard "Bunny" Berigan  
Abdullah Ibn Buhaina "Art" Blakey  
Charles "Buddy" Bolden  
Henry "Hot Lips" Busse  
Cabell "Cab" Calloway  
Hoagland Howard "Hoagy" Carmichael  
Sidney "Big Sid" Catlett  
Nathaniel "King" Cole  
William "Cozy" Cole  
Gene Patrick "Corky" Corcoran  
Earl Malcolm "Jock" Carruthers  
Harry Lillis "Bing" Crosby  
Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis  
Johnny "Scat" Davis  
Warren "Baby" Dodds  
Mrs. Tommy "Toots" Dorsey  
Harry "Sweets" Edison  
Roy "Little Jazz" Eldridge  
Edward "Duke" Ellington  
Henry Finkelman -- "Ziggy" Elman  
Irving "Prestopnik" Fazola  
John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie  
Glen "Spike" Knoplaugh Gray  
William Alexander "Sonny" Greer  
Locksey Wellington "Slide" Hampton  
"Skitch" Henderson

Earl "Fatha" Hines  
Mike "Peanuts" Hucko  
Willie Geary "Bunk" Johnson  
John R. "Yank" Lawson  
Norma Dolores Egstrom "Peggy" Lee  
James "Bubber" Miley  
Irving Milford "Miff" Mole  
Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton  
Joseph "Tricky Sam" Nanton  
Henry Joseph "King" Oliver  
Edward "Kid" Ory  
Oran "Hot Lips" Page  
Charles "Bird" Parker  
Dick "Stinky" Rogers  
Joe "The Old Left Hand" Sanders  
Arthur Jacob Arshawsky -  
- "Artie" Shaw  
Jack "Zoot" Sims  
Arthur "Zutty" Singleton  
Willie "The Lion" Smith  
Francis "Muggsy" Spanier  
"Sir" Charles Thompson  
Aaron "T-Bone" Walker  
William "Chick" Webb  
Charles Melvin "Cootie" Williams  
Eugene Edward "Snooky" Young  
James Osborne "Trummy" Young

Sources: The Encyclopedia of Jazz and BIG BAND JUMP, October-November 2009



Norma Dolores Egstrom "Peggy" Lee photo courtesy of Carleton College: apps.carleton.edu

# The Rise of Yiddish Swing

by DAVE SCHUMER

**Y**iddish swing. Jazz and klezmer. It may sound like an odd combination, but in late 1937 this mix of Old World and New took the music scene here and abroad by storm. The fad got its start when the Andrews Sisters, a young three-sibling act fresh from Minnesota, recorded an irresistible swing version of a forgotten Yiddish stage tune. “Bei Mir Bist du Schoen” (You Are Beautiful to Me) became an instantaneous hit, spawning an unending series of covers and, with them, a musical trend.

Within weeks, executives at New York’s WHN had created Yiddish Melodies in Swing, a weekly program dedicated to the new musical fusion. The talented pianist/composer Sam Medoff was hired to lead the show’s “Swingtet” and to arrange rollicking versions of traditional Jewish folk and klezmer tunes like “Dayenu,” “Eli Meylakh,” and “Yidl Mitn Fidl.”

**Yiddish Melodies didn’t just mainstream Yiddish culture, it reconnected a younger generation of American Jews to an older musical tradition**

Front and center on Medoff’s bandstand were the Barry Sisters (née Bagelman), whose close-as-air harmonies, punky energy, and seamless transitions from Yiddish to English packed New York’s 600-seat Loews State Theater every Sunday at 1 p.m. But Yiddish Melodies didn’t just mainstream Yiddish culture, it reconnected a younger generation of American Jews to an older musical tradition embodied by the Swingtet’s legendary clarinetist, Dave Tarras, a European-born klezmer musician with almost no equal.

Yiddish Melodies in Swing lasted



Clara and Minnie Bagelman, better known as The Barry Sisters  
photo courtesy of [yiddishradioproject.org](http://yiddishradioproject.org)

nearly two decades, outliving swing, the golden age of radio, and almost Yiddish culture itself. Small wonder that the 26 surviving episodes of the show are as fresh today as they were on the Sunday afternoons when they aired.

## Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen

The story of this tune’s stratospheric rise is as unlikely as that of Yiddish swing itself. “Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen” was composed by Sholom Secunda for a 1932 Yiddish musical that opened and closed in one season. Fast-forward to 1937. Lyricist Sammy Cahn and pianist Lou Levy were catching a show at the Apollo Theater in Harlem when two black performers called Johnnie and George took the stage singing “Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen” -- in Yiddish. The crowd went wild. Cahn and Levy couldn’t believe their ears. Sensing a hit, Cahn convinced his employer at Warner Music to purchase the rights to the song from the Kammen Brothers, the twin-team music entrepreneurs who had bought the tune from Secunda a few years back for the munificent sum of \$30.

Cahn gave “Bei Mir” a set of fresh English lyrics and presented it to a trio of Lutheran sisters whose orchestra leader, oddly enough named Vic Schoen, had a notion of how to swing it. The

Andrews Sisters’ debut 78 rpm for the Decca label hit almost immediately. The era of Yiddish swing had begun.

“Bei Mir” would soon be covered by virtually every pop and jazz artist of the age, and was even retranslated into French, Swedish, Russian -- and German. (The song was a hit in Hitler’s Germany until the Nazi Party discovered that its composer was a Jew, and that the song’s title was Yiddish rather than a south German dialect.)

The song’s success also sparked frenzied searches for other Yiddish crossover hits. Some attempts, like “Joseph, Joseph” (“Yosl, Yosl”), by the team of Chaplin and Cahn for the Andrews, and “My Little Cousin” (“Di Grine Kuzine”), by Benny Goodman, found modest success. But no Yiddish song would ever hit it as big again.

Sammy Cahn claimed that he bought his mother a house with money earned from “Bei Mir.” For her part, the mother of Sholom Secunda visited the synagogue every day for a quarter century to ask God for forgiveness, certain that he was punishing her son for a sin she had committed.

## Tarras and Brandwein

Dave Tarras, the Yiddish Melodies in Swing clarinetist, was brought up in the world of klezmer, the traditional instrumental music of Eastern European Jews. But he was no stranger to the New World technology of radio.

Apart from his longstanding gig on Yiddish Melodies in Swing, Tarras was the musical director of the low-power WBBC (Brooklyn Broadcasting Company), where he played old-fashioned bulgars and sweet waltzes between programs, tailoring the name of his ensemble

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Dave Tarras  
photo courtesy of yiddishradioproject.org

to whoever was footing the bill. His band could start the afternoon as Dave Tarras and the WBBC Ensemble, transform fifteen minutes later into Dave Tarras and the Breakstone Ensemble, and round out the hour as Dave Tarras and the Stanton Street Clothiers Ensemble.

Key to Tarras's success were his extraordinary music reading ability and his capacity to show up to a gig sober and on time. Neither quality was shared by Tarras's chief rival, Naftule Brandwein - - the other leading contender for the title of the twentieth century's greatest klezmer clarinetist.

### Onstage he wore an Uncle Sam outfit wrapped in Christmas Lights, which blew up one night

Brandwein was Tarras's opposite in almost every respect. Unable to read a note of music, he preferred the poker table to the bandstand and the liquor bottle to just about everything else. Onstage he wore an Uncle Sam outfit wrapped in Christmas lights, which blew up one night as his perspiration got out of hand. His playing was as rough and wild as his temperament, laced with elements of Greek, Turkish, and Gypsy music.

Brandwein was a fearless musician, always teetering on the edge of disaster. A favorite of Murder

Incorporated, for whom he performed in a famed hideaway behind a Brooklyn candy store, the talented iconoclast left a lasting mark on the development of klezmer music.

Aficionados of the genre argue to this day about which of the two klezmer masters, Tarras or Brandwein, was the greatest. As far as who was better suited to radio, history long ago passed definitive judgment.

### All that survives from the "golden age" of Yiddish radio in the 1930s to '50s are a thousand fragile discs, rescued from storerooms, attics, and even dumpsters

All that survives from the "golden age" of Yiddish radio in the 1930s to '50s are a thousand fragile discs, rescued from storerooms, attics, and even dumpsters. But what a story they tell! The Yiddish Radio Project is a celebration of these recordings and of the forgotten geniuses and dreamers who created them. The exhibits on this site feature the Yiddish Radio Project radio documentaries that were first broadcast on NPR's "All Things Considered," rare Yiddish radio clips, archival photographs, and various ephemera from a forgotten radio universe. <http://yiddishradioproject.org>

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Naftule Brandwein  
photo courtesy of yiddishradioproject.org

## Holiday Hint

by ROBERT REDDING

Just in time for the Holidays, here's a compilation of music that we all love and admire. This list was compiled by BIG BAND JUMP and is available from the BBJ radio show host, Don Kennedy.

We now have access to the newest CD set to be released, devoted purely to Big Band instrumentals. Don has divided these 50 musical tunes into a two-CD set, for a cost of only \$28.00 with FREE shipping and handling!

The familiar tunes you would expect to be included are the full versions of NO NAME JIVE, the original Charlie Barnet SKYLINER, and the Harry James trumpet rendition of YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU. We invite you to enjoy these famous tunes, some covered by the Olney Big Band.

Here are just a few of the great tunes you'll find on this wonderful compilation of big band instrumentals:

- Hawaiian War Chant  
Tommy Dorsey
- Jersey Bounce  
Benny Goodman
- Opus In Pastels  
Stan Kenton
- Tuxedo Junction  
Glenn Miller
- Doodletown Fifers  
Sauter/Finegan
- Jumpin' at the Woodside  
Count Basie
- Trumpet Blues  
Harry James
- All of Me  
Billy May
- Organ Grinder's Swing  
Jimmy Lunceford

This great compilation is available now at: [www.bigbandjump.com](http://www.bigbandjump.com) □

# Ralph Sutton the “Master of Stride” Pianists

by ROBERT REDDING

The New York Times, published on Wednesday, October 14, 2009, is the latest international report about “Stride Pianists”. “Stride”, a demanding form of piano jazz, grew out of ragtime in the 1920s. Its essence is a left hand that strides rhythmically across the bottom half of the keyboard while the right hand handles the melody.

Stride developed out of the long hours that pianists were required to play every night in Manhattan and Harlem, transforming ragtime into a more virtuosic style. Popular pieces, such as “Maple Leaf Rag,” gradually had their melodic lines replaced with more clever riffs and their bass patterns became more melodic. Soon, any march, popular song, and many classical pieces could be played in the stride idiom.

This style was originated in Harlem during World War I by Lucky Roberts and James P. Johnson. Other notable stride pianists included Willie “The Lion” Smith, Fats Waller, Art Tatum, Donald Lambert, Cliff Jackson, Eubie Blake, Dick Wellstood, Claude Hopkins, Ralph Sutton, Hank Duncan, Dick Hyman, Don Ewell, and Mike Liskin. The Wikipedia encyclopedia contains an alphabetical list of 35 such musicians—including a lady, Mary Lou Williams.

## ...undoubtedly one of the best pianists in jazz

This history reports on only one of these famous musical artists—now deceased. Ralph Gleason of the San Francisco Chronicle described Mr. Ralph Sutton as follows:

“Ralph Earl Sutton is without doubt the greatest exponent of



Ralph Sutton the “Master of Stride”  
Photo courtesy of [www.muempfer.de/jazz](http://www.muempfer.de/jazz)

the two hands and ten fingers style of jazz piano playing and undoubtedly one of the best pianists in jazz.”

Ralph was an American jazz pianist born in Hamburg, Missouri, just 87 years ago, on November 4, 1922. He died on December 30, 2001, and was inducted into the Big Band and Jazz Hall of Fame the following year.

His remarkable stride musical connections include the following:

\*\* He joined Jack Teagarden’s Band in 1941 while still in college. Two months later, he was drafted into the Army, where his assignments included playing the glockenspiel in the 104th Infantry Marching Band in the Mojave Desert. After his discharge, he was asked to rejoin the Teagarden Band at the Famous Door on 52nd Street in New York City.

\*\* In 1948, he began an eight-year run as intermission pianist at Eddie Condon’s Jazz Club in Greenwich Village on West Third Street in New York City.

\*\* In 1956 he relocated to San Francisco where he recorded several albums with Bob Scobey’s Dixieland Band.

\*\* In 1963, he was featured at the first Dick Gibson Jazz Party in Denver.

\*\* He was a founding member of the World’s Greatest Jazz Band an all-star mainstream band with Bob Hag-

gart and Yank Lawson as headliners, from 1968 until 1974.

\*\* Later in life, he performed in Switzerland, Alabama and Texas.

\*\* Is that all? No. Other fellow players included Fats Waller, James P. Johnson, Wild Bill Davidson, Earl Hines, Ruby Braff, and Peanuts Hucko.

\*\* Is that all? No. He appeared on the Dick Cavett show, Ed Sullivan Show, the Tonight Show starring Johnny Carson, the Steve Allen Show, and The Today Show.

Ralph was seldom without a gig, but life was not easy. In the 1970s, he was so poor he did not own a piano. Friends chipped in to buy him one. However, he never stopped making records, often to good reviews.

Conductor André Previn once called him “a piano specialist of astonishing skill.” Milt Hinton, the great jazz bassist, once said “I’m glad to have passed through this life just to have met Ralph Sutton.”

Finally, our Olney Big Band Director, Rip Rice, and member of the 104th Infantry Division during World War II, recalls that he was impressed with the piano player in the Timberwolf (104th Division) Swing Band – all of whom also performed in the Division marching band. He had a conversation with the Swing Band’s Director and asked, “What does the jazz piano player do in a marching band?”. The answer – “He plays the glockenspiel.” That must have been Ralph Sutton, and Rip was unaware of his post-WW-II prowess.

Ralph Sutton, the “Pianist Known as the Master of Stride,” died on Sunday, December 30, 2001, after suffering a stroke. He was age 79. □

# Two All Girl Big Bands - From both sides of the Atlantic

by RIP RICE

Recently, my friend and colleague (Joyce McClure) lent me a DVD of a British movie filmed in 2000, entitled *The Last of the Blonde Bombshells* and starring Dame Judi Dench. The movie chronicles a nostalgic look back at a WWII era all girl big band.

Seeing this movie put me in mind of my favorite all-girl orchestra of my yesteryears, that of Ina Ray Hutton. And while I was thinking of someday writing a story about Ina Ray and her band, Joyce McClure (a devoted OBB groupie) sent me some internet material about a British girl bandleader, Ivy Benson. If the American readers of this story are like me, the name Ivy Benson will be unknown. However, Ms. Benson's story is quite remarkable, and well worth telling – so here goes.

**Ivy Benson** was born in 1913 in Holbeck, Leeds, Yorkshire, England. She was the bandleader of a renowned all-girl band (Ivy Benson and her All Girls Orchestra) for over forty years, and was an accomplished musician on piano, electric organ, clarinet and saxophone.

Her father played several instruments in ensembles as varied as the Leeds Symphony Orchestra, theatre pit bands, and a comedy outfit, the Ten Loonies. Under his tuition, Ivy played the piano from the age of five, and, by the time she was nine, was performing on BBC Radio's *Children's Hour*, and in local working men's clubs, where she was billed as 'Baby Benson'. Her father wanted her to train to become a concert pianist, but she preferred to switch to clarinet, and then to alto saxophone. In her teens she won a scholarship to the Leeds College of Art, and

then worked in a factory for the men's tailors, Montague Burton, while playing for dances and socials in her spare time. After spending three years with Edna Croudson's *Rhythm Girls*, and touring with *Teddy Joyce And The Girl Friends*, Benson moved to London in the late 30s, and formed her own small groups. In 1940 she formed the nine-piece, *Ivy Benson And Her Rhythm Girls Band*, for the all-female revue *Meet The Girls*, which starred northern comedienne Hylda Baker.

World War II gave many British women opportunities that would never have been afforded them in peacetime. Ivy Benson filled the void in entertainment created by the lack of male musicians and bandleaders in wartime Britain with her undoubted talent.

During the years of World War II, Benson fronted bands varying in size from 12 to 23 pieces, sometimes augmented by strings. She recruited most of her brass sections with the aid of cornetist and conductor Harry Mortimer. With many of the established male band personnel involved in the war, there was plenty of work available, and Benson played prestige ballrooms and theatres throughout Britain, including a 22-week stint at the London Palladium, on the bill with top acts such as comedians Max Miller and Jimmy James, and the pianist duo, Rawicz and Landauer. In 1943 the band was appointed the BBC Resident Dance Band, a move that provoked expressions of fury and outrage from several male band leaders, notably Billy Tennent. Benson's

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**With the influx of American GIs into Britain, the turnover in personnel became frequent. Benson could lose an entire section overnight when her girls left to get married.**

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Ivy Benson  
Photo courtesy of ivybenson-online.com

main supporter throughout her career was orchestra leader Joe Loss.

With the influx of American GIs into Britain, the turnover in personnel became frequent. Benson could lose a complete section overnight when her girls left to get married. Over 250 of them are said to have been recruited during the band's 40-year life. Some joined when they were only 15 years old, and were musically trained by Benson, the woman that one of them called 'the mother hen looking after her young', although, by all accounts, they did receive the occasional peck if they did not comply with her signature tune, 'Lady Be Good'.

She was quoted as saying that every time her band played at an American army base they lost another member.

In 1946, Benson and her Ladies Dance Orchestra were booked for the first post-war broadcasts on BBC Television, but had to pull out after the massive Stoll Theatres Group, fearful of the new medium, threat-

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ened to cancel her contracts. She took the band to Berlin on its first overseas tour, with ENSA (Entertainments National Service Association), shortly after the Allied Forces had liberated the city. One of the high spots was a concert with Joséphine Baker in Bavaria, and, in 1960, Benson was playing the Lido, in Hamburg, when the young Beatles were across the road at the Indra Club.

Benson's band survived the radical changes in popular music that took place from the '50s onwards, adapting its style, while also leaning firmly on the nostalgic sounds of the war years. When playing her summer seasons to open-air audiences of 6,000 on the Isle of Man, Benson would add a sprinkling of light classics and show tunes.

Benson's band played at Königshof, Stuttgart, West Germany for many years, for one or two month periods. They played seven sessions a week, every evening and a couple of hours on Sunday mornings. People used to come in from church to enjoy the music and have lunch. It was a massive place and ran from 1966 to the late 1970s when it changed to a disco.

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...she changed the name of the band to 'Ivy Benson and Her Show Band', and fielded the occasional application from naïve male musicians by offering them the job if they could get into a dress, size 10-16!

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With the advent of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, she changed the name of the band to 'Ivy Benson and Her Show Band', and fielded the occasional application from naïve male musicians by offering them the job if they could get into a dress, size 10-16! By then, however, the best of times were long gone. Most of the variety theatres were closed, and the



Ivy Benson's band at Königshof, Stuttgart, West Germany  
Photo courtesy of ivybenson-online.com

dance halls had become discotheques. During its last years, the band played mostly for private functions, and with a touch of class, its final gig was at the Savoy Hotel in London in 1982. Benson continued to perform in summer seasons for a while before retiring to Clacton-on-Sea in Essex, where she was active for the charity Age Concern. She had confounded the critics in the band business who said that her girls 'couldn't sound as good as a man's band', and outlasted most of them. As an alto saxophonist, she could have held down a place in any band of her era.

Ivy Benson died in May 1993. It has been said that Benson and her band may have been the inspiration for the 2000 TV film, *The Last of the Blonde Bombshells*, a fictitious story in which a woman tries to reunite her (almost) all-girl swing band from WWII.

For those who may now have a deeper interest in learning more about this remarkable musician, there is a compendium of recollections and stories about the Ivy Benson bands. More than two dozen of these episodes written by some of the 250 or so young ladies who played with Ivy over the years can be found on the internet at: <http://www.ivybenson-online.com/Tales/1list.htm>.

Also, *A Life of Music* is a book written by Elsie Ford recalling many of the band's adventures – [http://www.ivybenson-online.com/life\\_of\\_music/index.htm](http://www.ivybenson-online.com/life_of_music/index.htm).

**Ina Ray Hutton** was born Odessa Cowan in Chicago Illinois, and at eight-years old, began singing and tap-dancing in the revues of the great vaudevillian, Gus Edwards; by the time she was eighteen, she had appeared in Broadway revues such as *The George White Scandals* and *The Ziegfeld Follies*. In 1934, Ina (elder sister of June Hutton of Tommy Dorsey's *Pied Pipers*) was hired by band agent Irving Mills to lead an all-girl orchestra, *The Melodears*, basically a dance/show band with a good sense of Swing. While the band's playing could be called routine, a few of the "sidemen" did manage to stand out, including Mardell Owen on trumpet, Betty Sattley on tenor sax, Alyse Wells, a multi-instrumentalist, and Betty Roubush (later Ruth Lowe) on piano.

Ina Ray could not play any instrument but with her eye-catching platinum blond hair and svelte figure she made an alluring bandleader. Dressed in a form-fitting silver lamé gown, 'The Blonde Bombshell of Rhythm' exuded sex appeal as she moved sinuously across the stage in front of the band.

From 1936, the band's repertoire was in the capable hands of Eddie Durham; Ina led the band in some Hollywood films and also did some recording.

In her book *Stormy Weather: The Music And Lives Of A Century Of Jazzwomen* (New York, Pantheon Books, c1984), Linda Dahl quoted a 1940 interview in which Ina Ray looked back on her career as leader of *The Melodears*:

"I just wanted to lead a band. It looked simple. Just waving a baton and waving.....You know. The boys liked it. We played the provinces. I guess I saw all the men in America out front. Some of them tried to get backstage – some sent mash notes. But I kept the sex in the saxophones. There were a lot of laughs and some

continued on page 9

## I kept the sex in the saxophones

tough breaks too. One night in Flint, we had a long haul to the next job. So we piled in the bus and started driving. It was wet out – both rain and drunks. A car hit us and the bus turned over. It was a mess. I had to crawl out a broken window. Then a woman asked me, ‘Are you Miss Hutton? I’d like your autograph.’ Everything happened on one job in Nebraska. My wristwatch and bankroll were stolen. The girls lost their instruments. And a firecracker blew off a couple of my fingernails.”

In 1939, Ina and band agent Irving Mills parted company and she became leader of an all male band which included Joe Servello, first trombone, Jack Purcell, guitar, Randy Brooks, trumpet and Stuart Foster, vocalist; George Paxton was the saxist/arranger. They were joined later by Hal Schaefer, jazz pianist and, in 1943, the Kim Loo vocal trio.

Paxton’s role with the band and with Ina Ray personally, became progressively more important and he became musical director; the musicians considered him to be the leader. But, in time, things changed. Ina Ray married Randy Brooks, Stuart Foster married one of the Loo sisters and in 1944, Paxton left to form his own orchestra. At that time, television called and Ina returned to an all girl band and was also in another film. Ina’s pianist, Ruth Lowe, later wrote two great Frank Sinatra hits – “I’ll Never Smile Again” and “Put Your Dreams Away”.

The ‘Melodears’ were probably the best known all girl band but for sheer musicianship, they were outclassed by ‘The International Sweethearts of Rhythm’, an all girl orchestra based at the time in Washington, DC. But without a doubt, Hutton’s ‘Melodears’ were one fine band and the young ladies all excellent musicians.



Ina Ray Hutton, the Blonde Bombshell of Rhythm  
Photo courtesy of nfo.net

Ina Ray Hutton was the only prominent American female leader during the big band era; she retired from music in 1968 and died in 1984 of complications from diabetes.

There are some personal CODAs for this author to all of this information about Ina Ray Hutton:

First - I recall seeing the Hutton all girl band playing in one of New York City’s theaters some weekend between September 1943 and March 1944. It was during this time that I was in the U.S Army and stationed in New Brunswick, NJ, attending Rutgers University. At least one weekend each

month, I was in New York City, digging all the big bands I could afford to see. Ina Ray Hutton’s all girl orchestra was on stage.

Second – In about 2003, when I was playing in the Columbia Jazz Band, we were doing a concert somewhere in Columbia. At intermission, our baritone sax player and friend and neighbor since the 1980s, Paul Hoskins, asked me to come into the audience with him, where he introduced me to Mardell Owen Winstead, former lead trumpet player with Ina Ray Hutton. After being properly awestruck at meeting Ms. Winstead, I asked Paul how he had come to know her. Well, he said, “one of my sons is married to one of Mardell’s granddaughters! Incidentally, Paul Hoskins played with the Olney Big Band for almost two years (2004/2005).

Finally, Ina Ray Hutton was married to trumpeter Randy Brooks (1949-1957). For a time, tenor saxophonist -- later turned big band arranger -- Ben Grisafi, one of the Olney Big Band’s favorite arrangers (My Buddy, Tea For Two, There Will Never Be Another You, Talk Of The Town, Big Band Blues, etc.) played with Randy Brooks before joining Billy Butterfield’s band.

Small world!

Sources: The Encyclopedia of Popular Music by Colin Larkin.

With major assistance from Joyce McClure and Paul Hoskins



Ina Ray Hutton and her Melodears. Photo courtesy of prudelutt.worldpress.com

# SPAM and Legs - 'Hormel Girls' Danced, Sang and Sold

by BRADLEY BAWEK

**N**estled just North of the Iowa border lies Austin, MN, the home of SPAM. Austin is SPAM, and SPAM is Austin, so much so, that in 1995 Austin officially branded itself as "SPAMTOWN USA". If you should be lucky enough to find yourself passing through this wonderful town, leave some time to visit the SPAM Museum. It was there that I discovered another all-American girl band, the Hormel Girls.

The Hormel Girls were the brain child of Jay C. Hormel, grandson of founder George A. Hormel and heir to the meat-packing giant in Austin, MN. Jay was a savvy businessman who had a penchant for show business, but his idea of creating the Hormel Girls was launched by post-war patriotism. As vice chairman of the American Legion's National Employment Committee, Hormel was part of an all-out effort to find jobs for returning soldiers. Finding jobs for women veterans who wanted to work was particularly challenging.

In 1946, Hormel hit on the idea of augmenting his company's male sales staff with ex-service women who would market products directly to homemakers. Hormel recruited G.I. Janes — WACs, WAVEs, SPARs, Women Marines and nurses — and he specified that they should have some musical talent so that they could occasionally entertain at women's clubs.

That same year, Hormel helped establish the all-female American Legion SPAM Post 570 in Austin, and he required his new Hormel Girls to join it. Decked out in green uniforms that made them look like flight attendants, the Hormel Girls were soon traveling around Minnesota and

Wisconsin, appearing in grocery stores to pass out samples of Hormel products.

The following year, Hormel recruited and trained 60 women veterans in an unsuccessful effort to win the formerly all-male American Legion National Drum & Bugle Contest in New York. Despite months of intensive training, the women failed to "bring home the bacon," as one of them ruefully put it. But their appearance at the New York convention created such a sensation that a national marketing program was born.

His all-female company of comely young performers sang, danced, played instruments and paraded into cities across the country in a fleet of as many as 40 matching white Chevrolets.

At their peak, after the group had grown to more than 60 performers, "Music with the Hormel Girls" was a top-rated weekend show on three different radio networks. But when the troupe was disbanded late in 1953, the Hormel Girls quickly disappeared from cultural memory, save for old photos.

All-female bands and orchestras were not uncommon by the mid-mark of the 20th century and the use of women to provide a face for brand products was a well-established marketing device. Jay Hormel was specific about what kind of girls made the perfect Hormel Girl candidates. You had to have talent — plenty of talent — to be a "Hormel Girl" in the decade after World War II. Plus you needed a "pleasant" look, a strong sales aptitude, the endurance of a plow horse and a thorough knowledge of Hormel products, such as SPAM and Dinty Moore.

Oh, and it goes without saying that you were expected to behave like a proper young lady, especially when wearing your green Hormel suit, black pumps and jaunty garrison cap.

Provided in part by  
David Hawley, Pioneer Press

Please note, Mr. Bawek is a native of Austin, MN, and admitted SPAM aficionado



"Music with the Hormel Girls" was a top-rated weekend show on three different networks  
Photo courtesy of minnpost.com

# Les Paul & Mary Ford

by ROBERT REDDING

**L**es Paul and Mary Ford were a popular 1950s husband-and-wife musical team in which Les played the guitar and Mary sang. In 1951 alone, they sold six million records.

The couple were introduced to each other by Gene Autry in 1946 and were married in 1949.

They first appeared in the pop charts in 1950. Between the years 1950 and 1954, Les and Mary had 16 top-ten hits. They had five top-ten hits within nine months, including “Tennessee Waltz”, “Mockin’ Bird Hill”, “How High the Moon”, (# 1 for nine weeks) “The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise” and “Whispering”.

From August 1952 to March 1953 they had five more top-ten hits; “My Baby’s Coming Home”, “Lady of Spain”, “Bye Bye Blues”, “I’m Sitting on Top of the World”, and “Vaya Con Dios” (# 1 for 11 weeks).

They were best known for their syndicated TV show “Les Paul & Mary Ford At Home” (1954-55).

Les Paul’s life story begins on June 9, 1916, in Waukesha, Wisconsin, born Lester William Polsfuss. He had taken up the harmonica and built his own crystal set by age nine. His first guitar was from Sears Roebuck. By the time he was 13, he had built his first broadcasting station and recording machine.

During a summer of touring, he traveled the Midwest and played in radio stations, clubs, fairs, theaters and dance halls. He performed countless late-night jam sessions with jazz artists such as Art Tatum, Roy Eldridge and Louis Armstrong. He hustled a gig with Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians, working five nights a week, coast-to-coast, on NBC. He acquired his first electric Gibson guitar, an L-5.

The first solid body electric guitar was invented by Les Paul, dubbed “The Log”. It was actually a 4”x 4” board with a pickup and an Ediphone neck.

In 1940, he left Waring to become the musical director of radio stations WJJD and WIND in Chicago and to play with Ben Bernie’s big band.

Paul’s career took a significant turn in 1943 when he and Bernie left Chicago bound for Los Angeles. Bernie soon died. Les created a new trio which worked with established stars, such as Bing Crosby, Burns and Allen, and Rudy Vallee. At Bing Crosby’s urging, Les built a new studio in his garage which used close mic-ing, echo delay, and multiple tracking. It attracted many musical artists to record there, including The Andrews Sisters, Peewee Hunt, Kay Starr, Jo Stafford and even W.C. Fields.

During his three-year stint with Fred Waring, however, he had experimented with the concept of multiple guitar recording, being the first to use multitracking in recording. He developed a legendary “Les Paul” line of guitars, said to make “the sound of rock and roll possible.”

Alas, fate intervened in 1948 as Paul’s car skidded off an icy bridge and dropped 50 feet into a snow bank. Eight hours later he was discovered with multiple injuries. He was left with no right-hand movement except with his thumb. But, his biggest successes were yet to come.

In December 1949, Les married Colleen Summers and promptly changed her name to Mary Ford. They developed sound-on-sound recording and promptly became elevated to international fame.

Although divorced in 1963, legally and professionally,

Les retired to a New Jersey home to continue inventing on a fulltime basis. Six years later, Les was again the victim of a serious accident—a broken eardrum. Despite this misfortune, Les appeared in a stream of concerts, club dates, and TV shows all over the country—even took a trip to Europe. He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988 and won two more Grammys in 2006.

That was not all. In recent years he invented the Gibson 1959 Sunburst Les Paul Standard with heavy tiger-stripe, flame-grained maple. The value of this guitar in excellent condition reached \$420,000 by 2008.

Les Paul died at the enviable age of 94 on August 13, 2009 from complications from pneumonia at the White Plains Hospital in White Plains, New York.

Many artists and musicians paid tribute by publicly expressing their sorrow. U2 guitarist The Edge said “His legacy as a musician and inventor will live on and his influence on rock and roll will never be forgotten.”



Les Paul and his wife, Mary Ford.  
Photo courtesy of peterstichbary.tumblr.com

## Key Personnel

Music Director: Dr. Rip G. Rice  
Asst. Music Director: Brian A. Damron  
Business Manager: David B. Schumer  
Sound Engineer: Paul Freirich  
Band Historian: Dr. Sue Vazakas

## Board of Directors

Dr. Rip G. Rice, President  
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Editor/Designer: Brad Bawek  
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## Friends of the OBB

The Friends of the Olney Big Band are people who love to listen and dance to big band music and are dedicated to keeping alive the spirit of American swing, dance, and jazz music. Friends support the efforts of the Band by encouraging volunteerism and by donating and soliciting and receiving gifts, bequests and endowments for the Band. Here is a list of our current Friends:

### Benefactors:

- Barry and Ali Fell

### Patrons:

- Dennis Dean Kirk, Sandy Spring Friends School

### Contributors:

- Roger Aldridge, Vera Bailey, Helen Kinney, Arabelle Kossiakoff, Mizell Music/Brass Note, Glenn & Nancy Ochsenreiter, Roy & Mary Popkin, Alan Remson, Charles A. Rubio Jr., Burkard Sievers & Rose Mersky, Halsey W. Smith, Robert E. Traut, Charles & Elsbeth Woodward

### Honorary Friends:

- Paul Freirich, Barry Schwartz, Joe Karam (in memoriam)

If you are interested in becoming a *Friend of the Olney Big Band* go to the OBB website and click *Friends of the OBB* for details.

## OBB Events Schedule

**Sunday, December 13** - Holiday Dixieland and Big Band Bash, Kena Shrine Temple, Fairfax, VA, 2:00 - 5:00pm

**Saturday, January 9** - Eubie Blake Big Band Celebration, James Hubert Blake High School, Silver Spring, MD, 7:30 - 10:00pm

**Saturday, January 16** - Going It Alone Club Annual Dinner, Leisure World, Silver Spring, MD, Private Party

**Saturday, January 23** - Friends House Concert, Sandy Spring, MD, 7:30 - 8:30pm

**Saturday, February 13** - Project Change Benefit Dance, Studio of Ballet Arts, Sandy Spring, MD, 7:30 - 10:30pm

## Rehearsals

Mondays 8-10 pm

*All full band rehearsals*

*Check OBB Players page on website for further details and updates*



## Words of Wisdom

Accept that some days you're the pigeon and other days the statue.

Always keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them.

If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.

It may be that your only purpose in life is to serve as a warning to others.

### For Band Information Contact

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