

Local Jazz History

Events in Suburbs Stealing the Show

Highland Jazz Inc. and summer festivals in communities such as Winthrop, Newburyport and Brockton have been outdoing Boston in presenting the area's top jazz artists.

Summer in New England. The best time and place to be. For many, the season includes outdoor music or an evening performance in a smallish, intimate and air-conditioned community auditorium.

Many of New England's jazz artists have been keeping busy answering the calls from Newburyport's Firehouse Theater, Ted Belastock and his Metro-South Jazz Festival in Brockton, Paul Roy and the Oceanside Jazz Festival in Winthrop, and Nancy Alimansky and the Highland Jazz venues in the Newton area.

The suburban presenters of jazz have been doing a fine job of putting forth New England's finest players.



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The inaugural festival in Brockton offered three days of solid performances in combinations too seldom heard in New England. Those attending Steve Marvin's tribute to Frank Sinatra with the Kenny Hadley Band won't soon forget that incredible night, and even Dizzy Gillespie himself would have marveled at the John Allmark Band's version of "A Night in Tunisia" in the concert tent on Saturday afternoon. Every band invited to perform in this marvelous event in Brockton featured New England performers. The only group not based in New England was Diva, the all-women's big band from New York, which backed up Duxbury's own Rebecca Parris. Familiar faces in the band included Greater Bostonians Lesley Havens on bass trombone and Barbara Laronga (trumpet), who never met a big band gig she doesn't like.

The City of Brockton should be saluted for recognizing the tremendous contributions to the New England music scene by renowned local performers Dick and Gary Johnson, Lou Colombo, Charlie Harris and George Masso. It was fitting that the festival's final performance featured this group, along with New England all-stars Dave McKenna on piano, Jon Wheatley on guitar and Marshall Wood on bass. There were several well deserved standing O's in Concert Tent 1 at the Brockton Fairgrounds to wind up what undoubtedly will be remembered as one of the greatest New England jazz events ever.

Was this just a one-shot deal? "No way," promises festival founder Ted Belastock, who already is planning for next year's event. However, to meet costs, the festival could use 300 or 400 more patrons.

The big question is whether Belastock will be forced to shell out big bucks for a "big name" from New York or Hollywood to improve gate receipts.

He would like to keep the festival a New England event. Expanding area alliances undoubtedly could help him do that.