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(F7D)

There are big bands ... Dick Murphy Band swings



Dick Murphy, whose big band plays Sundays at Angie's, demonstrates on the drums in his Walled Lake home. (Photo by Allen Schlossberg)

By JIM WINDELL

The 16-piece Dick Murphy Band has been swinging as the Sunday night house band for 10 months at Angie's, 30850 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills.

Both Dick Murphy and Mike Lupilloff, manager of Angie's, are extremely happy with their relationship.

"They've been here for almost a year without publicity and we have many regulars," Lupilloff said. "People come from as far away as Warren every week to listen to this. We are very pleased to have them."

Lupilloff also pointed out he is receiving regular requests from singles groups and other community social organizations that want to sponsor a Big Band Night for their membership.

Dick Murphy added, "We scouted around for a place to play our music. We came over to Angie's to ask them to give the big band sound a try and five minutes after we walked in the management said, 'It's a deal.'"

"ANGIE'S STUCK" their neck out for us," said George Stone, business manager and saxophone player for Dick Murphy. "It was four months before we really began to catch on. We know it was not a money-maker at first and we in the band were getting discouraged. But Mike (Lupilloff) kept telling us to hang in there. He gave everyone in the band a lift by his attitude."

Angie's had had disco clientele and on other nights of the week does a brisk business with recorded music. However, people asked for live big band music. To the management of Angie's, it seemed that all age levels were ready to go back to the music and dancing of a previous era.

George Stone said the band could tell when it was beginning to catch on.

"At first, the disco crowd would remain seated. After a few months, they, too,

were starting to get up on the dance floors. The over 30s were dancing all along. Now, people of all ages come to listen and everyone dances."

The music of the Dick Murphy Band is not just warmed-over dance band music from the golden era of the big bands. Murphy, who picks out the tunes his band will play, says the music covers a wide spectrum of sounds.

"We use modern arrangements," Murphy emphasized "and we don't stick to nostalgia. If big bands are coming back, it can't be based on nostalgia alone. To draw a modern crowd, a band has to play some contemporary songs and the style has to be up to date."

IN TERMS OF instrumentation, the Dick Murphy Band is traditional with five saxes, four trombones, four trumpets and a rhythm section. The rhythm section includes Murphy on drums, a string bass player and an electric keyboard.

One of their hour-long sets on a recent Sunday night started with Woody Herman's "Early Autumn," the sax section sailing smoothly along. The trombone section was highlighted on the easy-listening favorite "Here's That Rainy Day," and this was followed by Glenn Miller's "Tuxedo Junction."

"String of Pearls" featured the saxophones standing and playing in unison while couples on the dance floor did some light jitterbugging. Gary Reno on the electric keyboard took a short solo that established that this was a current arrangement of "String of Pearls."

There was, also, an old-time tune "Small Talk," contrasted with "In the Mood," "Come Rain or Come Shine" eased into a swinging version of the "St. Louis Blues" and the set ended with couples who couldn't resist the music gliding around Angie's ample dance floor.

Dick Murphy has been enticing people to dance with his music for some 39 years.

... And one-man bands Musician multiplies his talents

By JIM WINDELL

Everyone knows what a one-man band is, right?

It's a fellow who plays several instruments at once and has cymbals strapped between his knees. A novelty. Can he really play all those instruments at one time?

If that's your impression of a one-man band, take a look at Dennis Vernier at the Spanish Colonial Room in Howard Johnson's on Ten Mile Road in Southfield.

Through 20th century technological advances Vernier has taken the old idea of a one-man band and considerably updated it.

Although sounding like a quartet when he plays, there is nothing hokey about his musicianship. With him, it's a legitimate way of making music and not a gimmick.

"It's different and I like that part," the 29-year-old musician said. "There are thousands of musicians, but very few who would attempt what I'm trying to do."

"I WAS IN A FEW groups playing the guitar and musicians were always leaving. I was in a trio and the drummer left and the bass player and I worked together as a duo. When he left, I figured I could play the bass part with my foot pedal. So, I just sort of went on my own."

That was six years ago and during those years while playing a succession of clubs and private parties in the Detroit area, he has gradually added sophistication to his music.

He connected a phase shifter, a device that adds an organ sound, to his basic guitars. The six and twelve-string guitars are his main instruments.

A year ago while vacationing in San Francisco he saw an organist using a Roland rhythm unit and he knew he had to have one. Now, with the Roland he can operate a drum with his right foot.

The Roland, an advanced electronic unit, will keep a steady rhythm or even produce a drum roll on demand. The result is a quartet.

"People wonder where all the sound is coming from," Vernier commented. "I've played to rooms that seat a couple of hundred people and they all react the same. They dance and applaud just as if I were a group playing for them."

VERNIER IS pleased with audience approval because he was worried about how people would accept him as a one-man band. There was also the problem of being hired by club owners.



Dennis Vernier is a one-man band, appearing Tuesdays-Fridays from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. at Howard Johnson's Spanish Colonial Room in Southfield.

"Sometimes they hire on the basis of the number of people in a band rather than the quality of the music," Vernier says.

While his style is admittedly unique, his focus is always on the quality of the music. "I like to do a variety of things," he says, "and I'll play and sing songs that other musicians wouldn't try unless they have a hand with them for support."

"I'll try anything. From 'Top 40' to disco, country, folk and light rock."

He proves this during one of his one-hour sets when he plays from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Tuesday-Friday, at the Spanish Colonial Room.

With his guitar strapped around his neck and his equipment plugged in, Vernier is as low key on stage as he is off.

HIS MUSIC ranges anywhere from Chuck Berry rock 'n' roll numbers alternated with Johnny Cash, to the Bea-

ties and his own folk-like composition. He sings "City of New Orleans," a popular folk tune, in a pleasant voice with a slight twang.

"My Way" is handled in an understated but confident fashion, after which he sings his own song "Big Wheel." The latter is inspired by watching children ride their 'big wheel' plastic tricycles.

"I try to write tunes people can relate to," Vernier says. "I've always been impressed by writers who could write on any topic they desired."

Growing up in Dearborn, he had a wide range of listening habits. "I listened to just about everything from Lawrence Welk to Jimmy Hendrix," he says.

BUT HIS FAVORITE composers of music were John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

Vernier's first instrument was a clarinet he had at age 11. That quickly

gave way to an accordion and the accordion to a guitar.

By the time he went to Riverside High School he was playing guitar in dance bands with other teenagers. Following a couple of years of art and music classes at Henry Ford Community College, he began playing professionally in clubs and lounges.

Since he first played at the Steering Wheel in downtown Detroit eight years ago, Vernier has been composing more and more.

His guitar is central to his music, but his expertise at that instrument might be overlooked because of his restrained approach. In that regard, he resembles the man he has tried to emulate as a guitarist, Glen Campbell.

"I was always fascinated by Campbell's creativity," Vernier said. "People seem to underestimate his ability to play the guitar really well."

Actors electrify in final scene of O'Neill play

By HELEN ZUCKER

Meadow Brook Theatre's production of Eugene O'Neill's last play, "Moon for the Misbegotten," is a valiant attempt to unshelve a play better left shelved.

It is worth the price of admission for Robert Donley's terrific performance, for the electrifying final scene between Lisa McMillan and Donley (good acting is always a pleasure) and for Peter-William Hick's extraordinary set.

The finale of this ambitious drama contains all the action and all the language that strikes home. It's an extended short story, an epilogue to O'Neill's family saga, "Long Day's Journey into Night."

But the emotional freight needed to carry a full two acts is missing. Director Charles Nolte and everyone involved in the production thoroughly understands the material: the toll taken on the Hogans from farming the rock-filled Connecticut landscape, the effects of alcohol, poverty, and stifled sexuality, but there is no getting around O'Neill's garrulous script.

THE ACTORS give their all, but it's less than what is needed. The result is a slow-paced first act, a story that rambles between past and present, like a boozy dream, until we are caught up — too late — in the agony of Josie Hogan, virgin earth-mother and her feisty, stingy, heartbroken father.

The other three characters never really live. Lisa McMillan has a perfect Irish-colleen face: large blue eyes, black hair, good bones. She delivers her lines vigorously but her innate delicacy detracts.

As Josie, the vulgarist who has slept with half the county, as "the cow" who can handle her obstreperous, strong father, stay up all night, work the fields and keep the house all day, Ms. McMillan looks too delicate. One good swipe from Donald W. Dailey, the runaway brother, or Donley, would knock Ms. McMillan off the stage.

SHE IS, HOWEVER, at her best when she stands, face burning, shamed into admitting her virginity and her love for James Tyrone.

Turning into a Madonna who wants to save a hopeless man takes skill and Ms. McMillan is capable of the fast, subtle shifts called for by the ending.

Peter Brandon as James Tyrone Jr., the farm's owner, manages to convey a sinister "Ice Man Cometh" aura as he attempts to make love to Josie, then calls her "a blonde pig" for accepting the invitation, then talks the night away. His reasons to Josie for his drinking himself to death are unconvincing.

Brandon struggles nobly with an inadequate role. Dated phrases ("Broadway chorus girls," "tarts," "hot spots,") hang awkwardly in the air. The Tin Pan Alley utterances from Tyrone seem more likely from the head of a young, undeveloped playwright rather than the established O'Neill.

Brandon looks more like a healthy traveling salesman rather than a dissolute, spoiled college man.

THE NIGHT BELONGS to Robert Donley as Phil Hogan, hard-pressed farmer and curmudgeon. Donley, who carries most of the show on his experienced shoulders, is a witty, tough, hard-drinking man who has driven his sons from the farm.

He is funny delivering lines about his "fine, ambitious American pigs who make the most of every opportunity" when his neighbor complains that Hogan's pigs have trampled his fence and gotten into his ice pond.

And his sorrow at Josie's fate, followed by a quick leap into loud universal curses, is the evening's high.

Donley is adroit in a part that calls for no character change. He is powerful and can make the stage reverberate with feelings of massive betrayal when nothing much is going on.

David Jeffrey is suitably strait-laced as the neighbor, T. Stedman Harder, who wants to buy the Hogan place to finally be rid of the pigs and the loud Hogans. He stomps about looking outraged in his riding clothes. You know sooner or later he will get the desired property.

Donald W. Dailey is effective in his brief appearance as the brother who runs off with the help of Josie. He is a pale kitten beside his father and sister — all the more reason to wish him well far from the rocky farm from which he escapes.

Dailey adds to the sense of a family making life not merely hard but impossible for each member.

Lighting Designer Larry A. Reed is responsible for the gorgeous sunrise, and the beautiful (misbegotten) moon. Mary Lynn Bonnell's costumes were real.

The set, complete with fretwork around the torn screen door, wooden window panes, washboard, buckets, tree stumps, and the grey, shingled, unpainted house, is the best I've seen in years. Peter-William Hicks and Terence Kilburn, artistic director, pulled out all the stops for this production.

The play runs through Jan. 27 in the theater in Wilson Hall at Oakland University near Rochester.

Folk types gather at Ann Arbor fest

By DENNIS ROSENBLUM

Folk music is alive and well and living in Ann Arbor this weekend for the town's third annual folk festival on Sunday.

Shows are at 2 and 7:30 p.m. in the University of Michigan's Power Center for the Performing Arts. Tickets are \$7.50 per show or \$12.50 for both, available at the Michigan Union box office or at the door.

Last year's performances sold out the day of the concerts. This year, advance sales have so far been light, according to spokesmen for U-M's Office of Major Events. Tickets should readily be available.

Leading both shows is Philadelphia native David Bromberg, a guitar picker who was drawn to the genre by Pete Seeger at age 13, became a regular in New York's Greenwich Village for a few years and began recording albums in 1970. He has since moved both to San Francisco and to a more rock-influenced variety of song.

"I'm not married. I've got no kids," he said awhile back. "I spend my life on the road and I've no hobbies beyond playing guitar, fiddle and mandolin."

There's nothing else in my life, so don't mess with it.

Bromberg will appear with accompanists but without the David Bromberg Band (which will be performing in Ann Arbor in April).

ALSO PERFORMING in the afternoon show are Leon Redbone, noted for his use of props and wit; the Red Clay Ramblers, whose music has been described as "the disco music of our forefathers"; and Owen McBride, who offers bawdy Irish songs and soft ballads.

The evening performance, besides Bromberg, will include John Hammond Jr., who uses electric rhythm and blues; Mary McCaslin and Jim Ringer, who have a country orientation; and Hedy West, who sings of the Georgia mountains.

The festival is a benefit for the Ark, a 14-year-old non-profit coffeehouse in Ann Arbor. All performers have donated their fees.

The mirrored-glass Power Center is on Fletcher at East Huron streets, northeast of the U-M diag. For more information, call 763-5110 in Ann Arbor.