

Arranger-composer works for 2 bands

By JIM WINDELL

Thirty-one-year-old Livonia native John Katalenic is quiet and sensitive, given more to composing music than sounding off. But when it comes to writing scores for bands, his feelings show through.

And as an arranger and composer of music for both the Larry Nozoro Quartet and the Katalenic-Kwik Band, he is gaining a reputation as a musical force.

"Most of the time when you go to see a big band like a Woody Herman, a Maynard Ferguson or a Buddy Rich, they are like blastin' it. Their whole thing seems to be to come out there and blow everyone out of their seats. I like harmonies that are simple and sensitive," Katalenic said.

His sensitivity may have come from his position in a family of seven children. Katalenic is the oldest of the seven, five of whom are girls.

"THERE'S ALWAYS that sharing and the awareness of other people around me," he said. "I try to be sensitive in my writing to whomever I'm writing for, whether band, singer or artist."

Appearing as the pianist with the light touch in the Larry Nozoro Quartet, Katalenic had a chance to show another side of himself in a recent engagement at Friday's Cafe in West Bloomfield.

That quartet, featuring the leader Nozoro on reeds, now plays Sunday nights at the Crash Landing in Warren. The Katalenic-Kwik Band will perform June 25 and July 17 in the "Piazz" series at the Ponchartraine Hotel in Detroit, and the band will open for Melissa Manchester on July 25 at the Freedom Hill Music Theatre in Sterling Heights.

Katalenic's musical charts are most often showcased with the big band he co-leads with baritone sax player Gary Kwik.

"WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I was listening to Henry Mancini a lot," Katalenic said. "As I got older, I started to get hip to writers like Don Sebesky and some of the other writers and arrangers for the current big bands."

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He was turned on to jazz by the time he was 10 or 11 from listening to the records of Henry Mancini and Oscar Peterson, but he was fascinated by the idea of writing his own compositions. Katalenic tried his first composition at age 12.

While he didn't come from a musical family, his father saw to it that he got a musical foundation by sending him for accordion lessons beginning at age 6.

By the time he was 15, and with a number of trophies for musical skill, Katalenic decided the accordion was "not where it was at." He switched to the piano and in a year was playing weddings and other jobs around Livonia on weekends.

THIS CONTINUED until he graduated from Franklin High School and was drafted at age 19 into the Army.

"They put me in the MPs," Katalenic said, "and I was trying to get into the band."

After he was shipped to Vietnam as an MP, he finally received a transfer into the Army band, giving him opportunities to travel around Vietnam to do shows for the troops.

"I was into music there," Katalenic said, feeling lucky about the transfer. "I was in the band but also in a small combo where we played the music of Chicago, and Blood, Sweat and Tears and did things like the Bob Hope show."

Through musicians in the Army band, he heard about the Berklee School of Music in Boston. After leaving the Army, he headed straight for Boston to enroll in Berklee to study arranging and composition.

"I went there with the desire to write music," he said, "and Berklee gave me the tools I needed. It was the most intensive process I ever lived in. It helped clear up a lot of things for me and sent me on my way to be a writer."

ANOTHER THING Berklee did was

to introduce him to a fellow student named Allen Zivod, a pianist who had worked with Maynard Ferguson. Zivod became an influence on the piano-playing side of Katalenic.

"I took private lessons from him, and although we were both students he showed me a lot about playing the piano; he was a great inspiration to me," Katalenic said.

Following Berklee, Katalenic returned home to more seriously engage in writing and arranging music. He now lives on Detroit's northwest side.

He met and began to work with jazz saxophone player Larry Nozoro, with whom he feels very close. "The first time I ever met him, I said to him, 'I know you from somewhere,'" Katalenic said. Ever since, he and Nozoro have been like brothers.

He also met Gary Kwik. About a year ago, the two formed a band as an outlet for Kwik's desire to lead a band and Katalenic's need for a big band that would play his music.

After six months of weekly rehearsals, they debuted in a lunch-hour concert at the Edison Plaza in Detroit last September. They have since performed at the Royal Oak Music Theatre.

THE SENSITIVITY Katalenic likes to achieve in his writing appears in the charts the Katalenic-Kwik Band plays.

"Claus Ogerman is one of my new influences," he said. "That's where I want to go with my writing. I like the sound of strings and the feel of a symphony."

He attempts to achieve a "string feeling" by writing variety into the reed section, putting various musical colors together. While he uses the same number of reeds as other big bands (there are usually five in a band), he uses a different combination of two sopranos, an alto, a tenor and a baritone.



John Katalenic, pianist, composer and arranger, has been busy with both the Larry Nozoro Quartet and the Katalenic-Kwik Band. (Photo by Labe Wadell)

Big Band plays for dancing

Dick Murphy's Big Band sound is produced by a 17-piece orchestra.

The Big Band performs 8-11 p.m. Sundays at the club Angie's, 30860 Orchard Lake Road just south of 14 Mile Road in Farmington Hills.

Murphy, drummer with 37 years of musical experience, lives in Walled Lake. He put the Big Band together six years ago with a group of professional musicians.

Trumpeter John Smith, who heads the music department at Oakland University, writes all the Big Band's special arrangements.

Norm Simpson, vocalist, also plays the trumpet. Gary Reno has played the keyboards with Dick Murphy for 15 years.

THE DICK MURPHY Band has traditional instrumentation with five saxes, four trombones, four trumpets and a rhythm section. The rhythm section includes Murphy on drums, a string bass player and Reno on the electric keyboard.

For listening and dancing, songs in-

clude Woody Herman's "Early Autumn," featuring the sax section, easy-listening favorite "Here's That Rainy Day," featuring the trombones; Glenn Miller's "Tuxedo Junction" and the band's own arrangement of "String of Pearls."

Other songs are an original tune "Small Talk" contrasted with "In the Mood" and "St. Louis Blues."

For the younger set the band plays "Theme from Rocky," Barry Manilow's "Copacabana," or one of Steeley Dan's tunes.

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