

Thursday, October 9, 1980

Alexander's jazz band fulfills life's dream

By JIM WINDELL

When Tom Alexander was 14 years old, his father, concerned about the young teenager hanging around on street corners, bought him a trombone. Today Tom writes music and arranges for television shows and lives in Hollywood. And guess who plays the trombone?

If you guessed Tom's father, Dr. Charles Alexander, you are right.

Every Thursday and Saturday night at the Sussex House 19701 W. 12 Mile Road, Southfield, there is a doctor in the house.

In fact, there are two doctors in the house when Dr. Alexander's New Orleans Jazz Band gets together at the 16th-century-English restaurant Jimmy Jardaack built in 1969. Leader Alexander, a proctologist, is joined by banjo player Dr. Hal Carter, a radiologist.

THE MUSIC they play, with the help of four other musicians, is calculated to make everyone in the restaurant healthy. New Orleans jazz has a happy effect on the customers.

In the year the band has played regularly at the Sussex House, there have been few Thursdays and Saturdays when the bar-lounge room hasn't been packed. Not only by customers, but by other singers and musicians who frequently sit in with one of the few regularly performing New Orleans-style bands in the area.

Alexander formed Dr. Alexander's New Orleans Jazz Band to play specifically at the Sussex House. After playing a benefit for an ailing musician, Alexander asked Jimmy Jardaack about hiring his band.

"I liked jazz," Jardaack said recently in his restaurant, with the sound of the band in the background romping through "I've Got a Right to Sing the Blues."

"But I'm from the big-band era and I didn't know if the public wanted Dixieland."

Jardaack found he had to take out

table space to open a dance floor for regular customers who insist on dancing to the lively music.

Alexander is a no-nonsense kind of man. Between sets not too long ago, he said, "I asked for the job because I wanted to play tunes that were unusual and people don't hear everyday."

The band plays standard New Orleans jazz fare like "Bourbon Street Parade," "Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home," "Tin Roof Blues" and "Basin Street Blues." It also does such numbers as Jelly Roll Morton's "Mr. Jelly Lord" and "Black Cat on a Tin Roof."

ALTHOUGH ALEXANDER played trombone as a youngster, he gave up the musical instrument when he was in medical school.

At Detroit's Northern High School he had played with Frank Rosolino, who went on to be a renowned big-band and Hollywood studio trombonist. And he had seen bands at the Paradise Theatre when the recently revived theater was in its heyday.

"We'd go downtown to the Paradise to see Lionel Hampton or Duke Ellington and we'd be screaming and clapping and dancing. They had terrific acts."

Among his boyhood heroes were Tommy Dorsey, Jack Teagarden and Bobby Byrnes — all outstanding trombonists.

After being away from the trombone for nearly a quarter of a century and establishing himself as a success in another field, how did he get back in the swing of ensemble playing?

First, by convincing himself that he wanted his son to learn the trombone during adolescent years. "But, my wife remarked to me that when I showed Tom how to play a note or a song I usually held the horn too long."

HE BEGAN to pick up the horn at home to "get back into it" and soon found it fun to express himself again. Confidence in his musical abilities didn't quite match his self-assuredness

'I asked for the job because I wanted to play tunes that were unusual and people don't hear everyday.'

— Bandleader Dr. Charles Alexander



Dr. Charles Alexander of Livonia, trombonist, leads the jazz band that bears his name and plays at the Sussex House in Southfield.

in the office or when teaching medical students at Michigan State University. "It was terrifying at first," Alexander admitted. "I thought I must sound terrible after all the years that had gone by."

Sitting in with groups around town a couple of years ago, he found himself standing behind other musicians. But it all came back, and watching him grow out a solo during a low-down version of "St. James Infirmary Blues" there is no evidence of his former timidity. What does show is his debt to some great Duke Ellington trombonists.

Completing the roster for the jazz band are Dr. Hal Carter of Grosse Ile on banjo, Jimmy Amaro of Windsor on

clarinet, Bill Fulmer of Grosse Pointe Park on drums, Joyce McDonald (once pianist with Jack Teagarden) of West Bloomfield on piano, Bill Hayward of Farmington Hills on tuba, Claude Lambert of Farmington Hills on trumpet and Sylvia Browning of Livonia on vocals.

Alexander is a Livonia resident and practitioner. Sylvia Browning is Alexander's medical assistant.

"I always wanted to play in a jazz band," Alexander confessed. At one time he played in symphonies and in other big bands. "But I didn't enjoy playing in a suit and getting a few eight-bar solos each night. In the back of my mind I kept thinking I wanted to blow it out."



Joyce McDonald of West Bloomfield, who was pianist with Jack Teagarden, plays piano in Alexander's band.



Claude Lambert of Farmington Hills is trumpeter for the happy, New Orleans jazz sound.

For Family Fall Fun
A Cornucopia of Crafts
TIN & PEPPER
WEEKEND
OCT. 10, 11, 12
10-5
10-6
Demonstrations of power
working, tin smithing, Plus
many other crafts. Plus
some 20 additional
crafts. Also enjoy
various games, prizes,
and a chance to win
prizes. Open from 10-5
and 10-6. Free admission.
Refreshments and light
dinner by the Club.
Refreshments and light
dinner by the Club.

COMING UP NEXT
Glass Blowing Weekend—Oct. 17, 18, 19
Greenfield Village & Henry Ford Museum
Dearborn, Michigan

SENIOR CITIZEN SPECIAL...and you're 65 or
over, you not only enjoy a delightful fall weekend,
but you get 75¢ off regular admission. 50¢
off food and a hearty lunch for a special
rate of \$2.75 in the Clinton Inn

Weekends at The Inn: The movable feast.
Dancing and dining in the
Early American Room. Bring your
partner and a hearty appetite and well show you a
great time. Start with a delectable dinner. Top it
off by tripping the light fantastic to lively music.
If you'd like good things to eat and happy feet,
enjoy dining and dancing Friday and Saturday
evenings, 6 to 11, at The Dearborn Inn.
271-2700.

The Dearborn Inn
"Acres from
Greenfield Village"

This Week's Specialty
FRESH HADDOCK MERIWETHER
Bakes haddock fresh baked with a special
sauce of shrimp, crab, scallops and dumplings.
Includes salad, french fries, rice pilaf (or baked
potatoes) and hash—available.
\$7.95
Meriwether's
Telephone North 10 Mile South 15 Mile
208-8910 208-8910

PREVENT GREASE spots from bleeding
through painted or newly wallpapered walls
by applying a coat of shellac on the spots
before painting or wallpapering. Plant an
Observer & Eccentric Classified Ad and
watch it grow.

Tuesday Night is
Inflation Fighter
Night
At The
Shalea Inn
\$6.91
per person
Featuring: Post Frog Legs All you eat
and drink with: Cheese, Crackers and
Cakes. Soup, Salad, French
Fries, Roll and Butter
852-3410
3315 Auburn Road
Between Adams & Opdyke Rd.

The Deli
"Eat-In Carry-out"
35572 GRAND RIVER AVENUE, Northwest Corner of Drake
IN THE MUIRWOOD SQUARE MALL
FARMINGTON HILLS 478-0080
SALAD BAR - Build Your Own
A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE IN DELICATESSEN DINING AND DECOR
• Specialty Sandwiches • Phone Orders
• Imported Beer and Wine (Carry-Out Only)
• Hasagen-Daze Ice Cream • Tray Catering
• Trays available for all occasions • Party Business Meetings,
Holidays, Etc.
NOW HIRING

WEEKENDS OF October 11 - 12 & 18 - 19
Beginning in the morning at 10 a.m. and ending in the evening at 6 p.m.

A FREE TICKET FOR YOUR YOUNG PERSON to The Michigan Renaissance Festival

KIDS! Add more colors to our Renaissance Magic! Color the Wizard casting his spell and win a FREE ticket to the Renaissance Festival.

CONTEST RULES

- Two categories: Ages 5 and under, Ages 6 thru 12 are eligible.
- This picture must be colored by child entering contest.

PRIZES

- Exchange this ad for one free ticket to the 1980 Festival at the gate.
- Winners will receive free tickets for the family for the 1981 "Michigan Renaissance Festival". And... the winning pictures will be displayed at the 1981 Festival.

Child's Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____
Zip _____ Age _____

Tickets to Renaissance Merriment:
Adults: \$4.75 at the gate; \$4.25 in advance at Hudson's, Sears and participating Foto-mat Stores. Children: (5-12) \$1.50, under 5 free.

Groups of 25 or more, write Michigan Renaissance Festival, 24038 Joy Road, Redford, Michigan 48239 or phone (313) 535-1633.

For more information call 535-5996

The Renaissance Festival is located on the wooded grounds of Colombarie Center, 175 E. Dixie Highway/Waterford Exit (just past Clarkston). Directional signs and fluttering banners beckon you to the Renaissance Festival.