

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Pianists set mood for drinks, dining

In many lounges, it's the cocktail pianist who creates the right kind of atmosphere.

friendly, smiling, bushy-mustached piano player at Birmingham's Machus Sly Fox.

Take Joe Jelasic, for instance, the Jelasic has been cocktail pianist at the Sly Fox for eight years. His love for the job is evident — not only by his pleasant manner and smile but also by his note-filled solo excursions on the keyboard.

When he's enjoying a standard, his dark mustache turns up in a grin. After all the years he's been doing this, he still gets a kick out of playing "Stormy Weather," "What I Did for Love," "I'm in the Mood for Love" or "Moonlight in Vermont."

"The thing I like about being at the Sly Fox," said Jelasic between sets, "is the freedom I have to be creative without the pressure. I can create from my heart and soul and try to find the colors to match different moods."

Jelasic grew up in a musical family in Dearborn and then trained at Interlochen, Henry Ford Community College and Eastern Michigan University. Presently, he lives in West Bloomfield with his wife, vocalist Heidi Flynn.

"She sings in my trio Black Tie," Jelasic said about his wife while indicating he is involved in several musical ventures.

His Sly Fox cocktail-hour sets are heard 7-11 p.m. Tuesdays-Thursdays, 6 p.m. to midnight Fridays-Saturdays and 5-8 p.m. Sundays.

Jelasic also plays for the Sunday-brunch crowd at Oakland Hills Country Club. Then there's his Black Tie trio, which performs at special events, and his own booking agency called Black Tie Productions.

Does it ever bother him that in a lounge or at brunch people talk, eat food and drink rather than direct attention to his playing?

"No," he said, "because people are subconsciously listening anyway."

"I know this is true when someone comes up to the piano and asks me to play 'I'm in the Mood for Love,' as I'm playing the last note of that very song."

THE MOOD created by pianist Susie Woodman is definitely upbeat

and fun, at the Kingsley Inn lounge in Bloomfield Hills.

Outgoing and blond, Woodman keeps the piano bar lively during her Monday through Friday stints. She's also quick-witted, which helps in her job.

"Hey, you're not Pogo," said a customer peering into the lounge on a Friday evening and expecting to see Pogo, the other piano-bar pianist.

"No," quipped Woodman, "I'm stick."

No stick or stick-in-the-mud, Woodman has been around the pop-music scene in the Detroit area long enough to be able to handle most situations and most requests. However, she's not old enough to have the music of all the great, old-standards songwriters down pat. Which is why when a customer asked for a Jerome Kern medley, she responded with a smile and a bouncy "Chattanooga Choo Choo."

She also sings country music. During her three-hour sets, 5-8 p.m., her Top 40 approach to cocktail music includes some country tunes associated with Ray Charles and Ray Price. There's also some jazz, Duke Ellington and a contemporary classic or two like "Scud in the Glow."

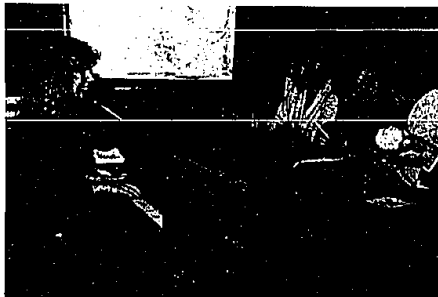
"This job is great for me," Woodman said, admitting that indeed she can't actually remember any songs Jerome Kern wrote, "because it forces me to learn all the songs I've heard all my life."

Her life began in the Saginaw area, but she got her start in music in Detroit when she played piano in the Phil Marcus Esser production of "Jacques Breil Is Alive and Well and Living in Paris."

Woodman has played with Jonathan Round and rock 'n' roll singer Meatball. Woodman, who's also blessed with a singing voice that complements her pop and modified-country style, has a country band called Freedom Star. In that group is her husband, drummer Peter



on music
James Windell



Susie Woodman is at the keyboard in the lounge of the Kingsley Inn in Bloomfield Hills. She alternates stints with Pogo at the piano bar.

ter Woodman. She also plays solo piano at the Midtown Cafe in Birmingham and plays with the band Illusion.

WHILE JOHNNY Trudell and his 14-piece band continues every Monday night at Jamie's on 7, the nightclub is planning to bring some big-name acts to Livonia.

The Count Basie Orchestra (obviously without the Count, who died last year) will play Monday, Feb. 18. Chubby Checker, the man who made

March 11. Checker will be making a rare Detroit-area appearance.

Jamie's also plans on bringing in the Glenn Miller Orchestra in May. (For more information about the entertainment schedule at Jamie's on 7, call 477-9077.)

Another musical event coming to Livonia will be a concert by the Bess Bonnier Trio, featuring Bonnier on piano, Dan Jordan on bass and Tom Brown on drums. Bonnier will play at 3 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 24, at the Livonia City Hall Auditorium. (For more information, call 421-2000.)

Theater tribute lauds 'Voices from Black America'

In celebration of Black History month, the Afro-American Studio Theatre of Detroit will present an evening of tribute to

"Voices from Black America" at 8 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, Feb. 13-15, at Wayne State University's General Lec-

tures Theatre in Detroit. Individual tickets are \$3.50. Tickets for groups of 10 or more are \$2.50.

For further information, call 869-0142 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. "Voices from Black America" was conceived

and directed by AAST Artistic Director Dr. Von H. Washington. It is a montage of comments from black life, tracing voices

of prominent individuals such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, Lorraine Hansberry and Margaret Walker.

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