

Beneke relives big band era

Meadow Brook Music Festival's "Salute to the Big Bands" on July 28, attracted a crowd craving the sounds created by Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Harry James, the Dorsey Brothers and all the Swing Era greats. They got what they came for and then some.

The warmth and sense of camaraderie flowing between the audience and performers were palpable. The crowd tuned out for great melodies beautifully delivered. Tex Beneke with his brilliant band, and diminutive, talented Helen Forrest performed fantastically.

Tex, who still looks like a loveable bulldog and his 15 seasoned musicians swung into "Moonlight Serenade" and a mellow rendition of "String of Pearls." Working with half of a big band's full contingent of 30 musicians, Beneke's group still produced that full, round sound which characterized the era. Easy professionalism marked the night.

When the band played "Pennsylvania Six Five Thousand," the crowd sang out the title and played chorus throughout. Tex talk-sings. He sounds like a dad happily singing in the shower but since he plays such gorgeous tenor sax, who cares?

Louie Armstrong couldn't really sing; he joyfully belted riffs. Rex Harrison couldn't sing either; he talked so well in "My Fair Lady," no one cared. Tex's singing falls along those lines.

"Tuxedo Junction" was heavy on

brass at the outset but the band soft-pedaled it at the end. The first half of the show wound up with a funny rendition of the "Song of the Volga Boatman" featuring saxophones, drums and handclapping musicians.

Paula Kelly Jr., singing in Mom's footsteps, Tommy Traynor, Rich Maxwell and Steve Johnson, comprising The Modernaires, did a nice medley of Ray Eberle tunes including "Moonlight Cocktail" and moved on to "Juke Box Saturday Night." The group carried out a funny parody of "All in the Family" wherein Maxwell played dingbat Edith and Johnson played Archie. Traynor's voice carried The Modernaires.

But it was Beneke and his drummer Gene Estes, playing their 1942 hit, "American Patrol" and pert, blonde, sophisticated Helen Forrest singing Columbia's first gold record, "It's Almost Like Being in Love," that brought the crowd to their feet. Forrest sang with a full heart and "Hallelujah" was a terrific display of her control, timing and playfulness. She left the stage, rendered unable to speak by the standing ovation she received. "Moonlight Serenade," the song that's become the signature for the Big Band era, ended the concert. For an encore, all the performers came out, joined hands and sang "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree with Anyone Else but Me." It was a big night for Big Band lovers.

Helen Zucker has many years of experience reviewing pop performers for newspapers and magazines in Michigan, New York and Massachusetts.



Helen Zucker



Paula Kelly Jr., backed by the Modernaires, helped to bring back the big band era to Meadow Brook for at least one evening.



Paquito D'Rivera, left his native Cuba in early 1981 and has since carved a thriving jazz career for himself in the U.S. and Europe. He'll perform on the alto sax at 7 p.m. Friday, Aug. 1, on the outdoor terrace of Hotel Pontchartrain during its P Jazz Weekend.

upcoming things to do

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PLAZA JAZZ
A weekend of free jazz concerts is set for 2-9 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 9, and 2-7:30 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 10, in the Pontiac Phoenix Center Plaza. Saturday's performances include Sheila Landis and Top Drawer, Duke Dawson, Orange Lake Drive, Sherrin Mitchell & Swinging Society and Marcus Belgrave. Sunday will see Dangerous Dan Turner, Sportcoat and OPUS IV, J.C. Heard, The Lyman Woodard Organization and Tito Puente's Latin Jazz Ensemble. Food and beverages available on the plaza. Bring your own blankets and lawn chairs.

WALKER & BUDSON
Ursula Walker and Buddy Budson perform from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Friday and Saturday through the summer in lobby of the Omni Hotel, downtown Detroit. From 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Aug. 27-29, they will appear at Galligan's rooftop, Jefferson at Beaubien, downtown Detroit.

JUST FOLK
Josh White Jr., once a regular at the now defunct Raven Gallery performs at 8:30 p.m. and 10:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 7 to Sept. 11, in the Comedy Crossing, Telegraph and Nine Mile, Southfield. There is a \$6 cover charge. The Ron Coden Show continues at 8:30 p.m. and 11 p.m. Friday-Saturdays through Aug. 30 at the Comedy Crossing, downstairs from the Red Cedars restaurant. For more information, call 353-5170.

Players need storage space

The recent sale of Washington School by the Wayne-Westland School District has created a housing crisis for the Spotlight Players. For the last several years, the community theater organization for the Wayne-Westland area used the gymnasium at the closed elementary school on Glenwood near Wayne Road to store sets, props and building materials.

Now the players are looking for other quarters for storage and set construction. They need about 3,000 square feet to store scenery, props, lumber, paints and other materials. Those who can help should call Vicki Cravens at 326-5542 or Debra Swain, 729-6453.

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