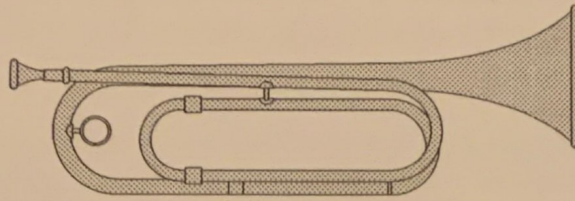


# **BIG BAND BUGLE**



## **QUASI-OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER Big Band of Rossmoor**

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**THIS IS WHAT WE ARE ALL ABOUT!**



## IF A PICTURE IS WORTH 1,000 WORDS...

Then the picture on the front page of this newsletter has to be worth about a million and a half, give or take a few. It tells the story of big band music bridging the gap of 70 years or three generations, maybe even four. If anybody tells you that OUR music is dead, point out that George Gershwin, Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and many others were born in the 1800s. They may be dead but their music is very much alive.

One of the most miserable evenings of my life was at a charity affair in Chicago at a "concert" by Chuck Mangione. You tell me how to play the trumpet while hopping around like a banshee. I mentioned Mangione to a jazz disk jockey friend of mine and commented that Chuckie baby only knew about seven notes. His reply: "Yeah, and three of them are wrong."

There is more to music than "yeah yeah bay-bee" as you and I are so well aware. The fact that Vern Brown is sitting next to 15 year old Billy Buss at last spring's "Concert at the Res" and playing the same tunes at the same time speaks worlds of what the Big Band is all about.

Our stated mission is to keep the music of the 30s and 40s alive for our children and our children's children. Today's teen idols come and go so fast even the kids can't tell you who was heading the charts two years ago. What was the name of the group that made the tremendous "hit" of a few years back: "Who Let The Dogs Out?" Does anyone care?

OK, we had our own silliness; every generation does. Remember "Three Little Fishies?" "Flat Foot Floogie?" "Caldonia?" "Cement Mixer Puttee Puttee?" Spike Jones? But Music with a capital M was the key. Glenn Miller died in 1944. Did you know that the Glenn Miller orchestra played San Francisco last year? And they sure didn't do any "yeah yeah bay-bee" and no hopping guitars either.

So we are doing our job in helping to keep the music of the big band era alive. You all know it isn't easy but it is worth the effort. You are all to be congratulated for your commitment to the Big Band of Rossmoor. From Vern Brown's "Fun Band" with six members to today's aggregation of 28 talented musicians, you've come a long way. But there is still a long road ahead and miles to go before we sleep.

### FROM THE JULY SURVEY...

On a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with the Band at present?

	Average	8	Range 6-10	
Number of performances?	Average	8	Range 5-10	
Sound of the Band?	Average	7.2	Range 5-9	
Selection of Music?	Average	8.2	Range 5-10	
Rehearsal Time Management?	Average	7.6	Range 1 (!)-10	
Types of Gigs	Average	7.6	Range 5-10	

Results were pretty much divided evenly between dues and no dues.

## IN THE BEGINNING...

There was Vern Brown, a beat-up old C-Melody sax and an idea. You all know Vern and his dedication to the Big Band of Rossmoor; this is his story which is also the Band's story.

Vern moved to Rossmoor in 1990 after a 33 year career with the U.S. Geological Service and four years in the navy during WWII as the captain of two mine sweepers in the Pacific. Rich Spry, a member of his crew in the navy, is a neighbor in Rossmoor. He described Vern as the calmest guy he ever knew, even under enemy fire. That's the Vern we all know.

While living and working and raising a family in Sacramento, Vern never lost touch with his saxophone. When he got to Rossmoor, he felt a need for some fun and organized the Original Fun Band in 1991 consisting of six members: three saxes, piano, drum and bass. And then there were eight: Jan and Herm Cordes heard about it and joined up. Herm was the entire trumpet section at the time and Jan was the lead (and only) clarinet.



### **The Original Rossmoor Fun Band (1991)**

(from left) Ed Luce, drums; Herm Cordes, trumpet; Aline Axtell, piano; Vern Brown, sax; Herb Daley, sax; Monte Edelen, sax; Herm Allington, bass; and Jan Cordes, clarinet.

## FUN BAND INTO BIG BAND...

The word got around, as words have a way of doing, and by 1993 the band had grown to about a dozen happy players. The picture below is from the Rossmoor News of 6/23/93 and shows Phil Hardyman leading the expanded group. Vern Brown is on the left front row and Jan Cordes is on the right. Dorothy Johnson is playing the banjo and there is Bob Sutherland on the right in the back row.

# Fun Band entertains at lunch



Illness caused Phil to retire in 1996; enter Mo Levich. Dorothy Johnson also led a dance team in Rossmoor that marched in the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade in Orinda every year where Mo led the volunteer marching band. She brought Mo over to Rossmoor as leader and like Topsy (or was it Eva?) the band grew and grew and grew. When he took over, it was a about a dozen pieces and you know how big we are today. Mo was friendly with Oz Ramsey and Oz not only joined the band on clarinet but donated a huge library of arrangements his band no longer used.

Oz's friendship with Frank Como paid off big in bringing Frank on board with his great arrangements and musicianship. The Band now has a range of musicians from 8<sup>th</sup> graders to octogenarians and exemplifies the true meaning of Generations in Jazz. More than 100 musicians of all ages have passed through the ranks of the Big Band over its 12 ½ years of existence and all have contributed their knowledge, wisdom and musicianship to the legacy of Big Band music.

In the early days, Vern's wife Lida would bake a cake and cookies every March for a birthday party for Band members. When she passed away in 2001, Mo and Herb Sontag played a trumpet duet of "Lyda Mae" at her services and Herb followed with a solo on "Holy City." Perhaps it is time to resurrect the annual birthday party; any thoughts?

*My thanks to Vern Brown, Jan Cordes and Mo Levich for their great help in putting together this brief history of our Band.*