

Big band bonanza: An evening of jazz

By Richard Houdek
Special to The Eagle

PITTSFIELD — Just as the music of Mozart and Beethoven, or Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, bear decided differences in texture and nuance, so do the works of the American jazz masters we revere —

Kenton and Basie, Herman, Ellington and Goodman.

Those differences, occasionally subtle, often startling, are the focal points of a concert by the American Jazz Repertory Orchestra this evening at 7:30 in the First United Methodist Church.

If you go ...

What: Pittsfield CityJazz Festival
Who: Big-band drummer Clem De Rosa and the American Jazz Repertory Orchestra
When: 7:30 tonight
Where: First United Methodist Church, 55 Fenn St., Pittsfield.



The performance, conducted by the orchestra's director and founder, Clem De Rosa, and welcoming the talents of several celebrated local artists, is being presented by Berkshires Jazz, Inc., sponsor of the autumnal Pittsfield CityJazz Festival.

Ed Bride, CityJazz founder, will be at the lectern to discuss the varying temperaments of jazz music, and De Rosa will lead his 16-person ensemble in a program exploring the Great American Songbook and the music of the Big Bands. They will be joined by several members of the Berkshires Jazz All-Stars: saxophonist and clarinetist Charlie Tokarz, vibraphonist Gary Miller, guitarist Andy Kelly and vocalist Vikki True. The concert is a prelude to this year's Pittsfield City Jazz Festival, Oct. 7-18, which includes an appearance by the Dave Brubeck Quartet.

De Rosa, a big band drummer, a member of the Jazz Hall of Fame and a pioneer in jazz education, has known many of the great jazz figures. During his military career, he served with one of Glenn Miller's Air Corps Bands and later took one of Miller's "ghost bands" on a European tour of concert and dance dates. He also has escorted the legacy band of Benny Goodman on the road.

But, according to De Rosa, his closest relationship involved Stan Kenton. "We were very good friends," said De Rosa one day last week during a telephone chat from his home in Ft. Lee, N.J.

De Rosa was a founding faculty member of Kenton's Stage Band Camps, he said. Chuckling, he added that the term "stage band" was employed as a euphemism in the days before jazz was a respectable word to use. The camps later became known as the Kenton Clinics.

Kenton's music had a most distinctive character, said De Rosa. "Stan was a composer and had a deep grounding, and interest, in the

classics, in classical music, and his orchestra was more of a concertized orchestra than a dance orchestra. He was always an adventurous kind of person. That's how he got into Latin Cuban fire music and the 'City of Glass,' he said.

"Intermission Riff" and "Street of Dreams" are two of the Kenton treasures De Rosa plans to explore in tonight's concert.

Count Basie's ensemble, De Rosa observed, was one of the first swing jazz orchestras — from the early '30s — in Kansas City. His structures in jazz arrangements opened up opportunities for jazz soloists.

"He had so many great soloists," De Rosa said.

The concert will include "One O'Clock Jump" and "Moten Swing." And then there is Duke Ellington.

"Duke is the maestro, the master. We all looked up to him," De Rosa said. "He was so creative, and of course Billy Strayhorn, who wrote many of the arrangements. Duke preceded Stan [Kenton] as being very adventurous. His orchestral colors were so different from any that we were using and made his orchestra solos interesting, in terms of voicing, and in terms of instruments. We were all impressed. We would listen to him on the radio, or on a recording, and think, 'what's he doing there?'"

Audiences tonight will sample Ellington's "Mood Indigo," "Satin Doll" and "Cottontail."

Benny Goodman, De Rosa recalled, was a loner.

"We were as friendly as anyone could be with him," he said. "At least he knew my name — with him that was a major accomplishment; sometimes he couldn't remember his daughter's name."

De Rosa describes Goodman's ensemble as "a straight ahead band out of that Chicago style, just the straight 4/4 style. He also had a very good dance band; his library consisted of a lot of dance music, and that catapulted his band above the others. His rhythmic pulse was very danceable."

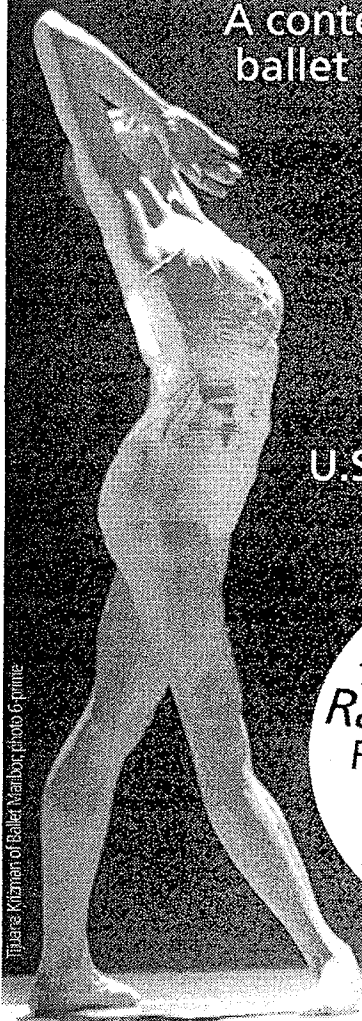
De Rosa, of course, could not

July 1–5 at the Pillow

Radio and Juliet
by Ballet Maribor
A contemporary take on
ballet and Shakespeare,
to the music of
Radiohead
"White hot"
— Pittsburgh
Post-Gazette

Lafa & Artists
U.S. company debut
from Taiwan

\$35 tickets
for 35 and under
Radio and Juliet
Friday, Saturday
& Sunday
performances



200 free events • 163 acres • 50 dance companies • 3 stages • 1 Pillow

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE

Reserve your seats today!

413.243.0745 • www.jacobspillow.org

Big band bonanza: An evening of jazz

resist Goodman's signature "Let's Dance" on tonight's program and also will include "Flyin' Home."

In alternating Big Band and smaller chamber settings with members of the band and the Berkshire Jazz All-Stars, some of the memorable songs of the era will be explored — pieces such as "Come Fly With Me," "Blue Moon" and "All the Things You Are."

"We have the Buddy Rich [version] of 'Love For Sale,' the arrangement written for Buddy's band. I've made a few changes, basically in harmonic construction; it's an up-jazz swing version, different from what [Cole] Porter wrote," said De Rosa.

The songs will put the spotlight on Vikki True, the area's popular vocalist. "I'm really excited," said True, who has earned her reputation through a diverse career that has included gospel, and blues, as well as jazz. "I'm going to do 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love,' which will be fun. And we'll do a loose version of 'All of Me,' trading back and forth with the band, and the horn section with Charlie [Tókarz]."

"I think we'll give 'Blue Moon' a try, and 'Lover Man,' which is one of my all time favorites," True said.

She has been teaching voice but absent from the concert scene for a time, recovering from an illness.

"I'm back," she declared.

American Jazz Venues was formed five years ago when De Rosa joined three celebrated jazz figures for lunch: Rufus Reid, the bassist; Michael Moore, Dave Brubeck's bassist; and Joe Temperley, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra's baritone sax player.

De Rosa expressed his concern for developing a new and younger audience for jazz.

"The point is to get 'em while they're young," he explained. "Sometimes I have set familiar nursery rhymes to music, like 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' or 'Frère Jacques.' What's interesting is, when we do get into the schools, and when the youngsters hear the band, they begin tapping their feet to recognizable melodies."

How have we been conditioned to sit quietly and motionless to Beethoven or Mozart but must tap our feet and bob our heads to good jazz?

"I think the constant rhythmic pulse and the intensity of jazz tend to make the body move," said De Rosa. "If you don't start moving to it and get some reaction, there's no blood in your body." BW