

Charlotte Jazz Society History

In 1985, a movement was underway to begin a Jazz Society here in the Queen City. A few people dedicated to the cause set up the non-profit status with assistance from Charles Johnson, and sought ways in which we could build respect and support for both local jazz musicians and those from the national scene. Over the next fifteen years, the Charlotte Jazz Society grew to include as many as a hundred members. At that time, WFAE moved from its university location, improved its power and served up regular jazz in its programming, featuring the well-liked deejay-Barbara Nail, doing an overnight program.

The Society undertook regular monthly general meetings, often in the basement jazz room of Jonathan's, at the corner of Tryon and Seventh. These meetings included live jazz played by a variety of jazz groups from the city. The Society also helped the free major jazz festivals which ran for almost a decade uptown at several simultaneous locations, including stages at Trade & Tryon, Fourth Ward Park and others. Several members were directly involved-interviewing visiting national artists as part of the educational component of the festivals.

A regular Society Newsletter was mailed, mentioning upcoming jazz events, and containing columns written by staff. The Society ran a number of major events with one or more bands appearing at local clubs. Money was raised for scholarships used by young players/singers to attend college- and university- music schools.

An outreach program into the public schools was begun under the leadership of Johnny Holloway-former educator from West Charlotte HS and himself a fine tenor saxophonist, and Dr. John Harding a trumpet player who headed up the jazz program at UNC-Charlotte. Begun as a volunteer effort, the success of the program grew, and with matching grants from the Arts & Science Council, for about a decade, the Society placed paid jazz quintets into over one hundred different schools in the CMS System. Narrated by Harding, these one-hour programs brought examples of a half-dozen jazz styles to over ten thousand students, K-12.

Unfortunately, the Society splintered and dissolved around 2000, and the organization became dormant for the next seven years, until several former members and some newcomers began efforts to resuscitate the cause.

TODAY....

Now, with regular meetings at Central Piedmont Community College, a Board has been established--with Marlene Ferguson as President; Scott Bauer as Vice-President; John Alexander as Educational Representative; and John Harding-Secretary/Treasurer. Attorney Charles Johnson helped re-establish the non-profit status for the group.

The new website will provide information concerning jazz venues and activities here in Charlotte, and links to individual musicians and bands. Several levels of Society membership have been established anticipating that a General Membership will arise. Another important project that is underway headed by John Alexander who has gotten support from both CMS and the Musicians Union and has already begun to coordinate school visits by local musicians.