

"The Rowan Blues & Jazz Festival is a true gem in our State. It showcases all that is American and why Blues music still matters! A must see for those who appreciate this art form and a must for those who'd like to know what the blues are all about. You will walk with a great understanding of the beauty of this first noted American form of music!" ~ Tina Terry

PIEDMONT TALENT AGENCY, CHARLOTTE, NC

Articles from the Salisbury Post

By Steve Huffman

Salisbury Post - Published October 10, 2004

The type music played was different, but Eleanor Qadirah said Saturday's Rowan Blues and Jazz Festival was reminiscent of the famed Woodstock festival of 1969.

"It's Salisbury's miniature Woodstock, but without the drugs," Qadirah said. "It's just good music."

And lots of it. The sixth annual Blues and Jazz Festival was held in downtown Salisbury, and featured some of the best jazz musicians the Southeast has to offer. W.C. Handy Award winner John Cephas was the biggest draw, and even though his sidekick, Phil Wiggins, couldn't make the event because of heart problems, few spectators were complaining.

Jazz music continued throughout the day and into the night, with a variety of performers taking the stage.

The festival was held in the parking lot of Great Expectation Wellness and Fitness Center, now the site of the Salisbury Farmers Market. Several musicians performed the works of North Carolina native John Coltrane, the legendary jazz musician celebrated at this year's festival.

Qadirah, the event's organizer, said musicians ranging in age from 16 to 81 performed as part of the festival. A youth workshop held in conjunction with the festival Saturday morning at Rowan Public Library drew participants as young as 6, and from as far away as Goldsboro.

Saturday's weather couldn't have been more conducive to an outdoor music festival, with clear skies and highs in the mid-70s. Qadirah said that if there was a drawback to the event, it was in the few number of spectators who remembered to bring their lawn chairs or blankets.

The asphalt parking lot doesn't make for the best seating, Qadirah admitted. "I go through the audience asking, 'Where's your chair? Why didn't you bring a chair?'" she said. "They don't think they're going to stay, but they always do. They come for a taste of the music and they fall in love with it."

Which is exactly the festival's goal, Qadirah said. She said the aim of the event is to "preserve, promote and present jazz."

If that be the case, then the festival's goal was realized. Plenty of preservation, promotion and presentation of jazz took place.

Scott Huffman, president of WebKorner Internet Services, said his company was one of the sponsors of Saturday's event.

A native of Spencer who now lives in Charlotte, Huffman said he enjoyed the event and promised his company would be back next year to continue its sponsorship.

"We'll be trying to make things a lot bigger," Huffman said. "Jazz touches a lot of people, it goes to everybody."

Cephas, the festival's top draw, said the Rowan event continues to grow. Saturday marked the third time he's traveled to Salisbury for the gathering.

"This festival is absolutely superb," Cephas said. He said Qadirah is the reason.

"Eleanor largely does it by herself," Cephas said of the work that goes into making the festival happen. "That in itself is amazing." ■

Well it's a marvelous night for a moon dance

With the stars up above in your eyes
A fantabulous night to make romance

'Neath the cover of October skies
-- Van Morrison

By Jim McNally

Salisbury Post - October 9, 2005

And, unlike the Lord Salisbury Festival's first two rain-ruining ones, Saturday was indeed a marvelous night.

Plenty of toes were tapping at the Seventh Annual Blues & Jazz Festival. That was the good news.

But perhaps the better news for event organizers, however, is that those same toes were not splashing into a puddle on the down stroke.

"I'm loving it," said Eleanor Qadirah, the founder and driving force behind the Rowan Blues & Jazz Society, the group that organizes the event. "All you have to do is believe, and then sit back and be amazed."

That most of the concert -- which included six local and national acts -- was performed free of rain was indeed something of a miracle. The chance of rain for the area for much of the day, in an area that included almost the entire eastern seaboard, was right at 100 percent. Charlotte, and into Cabarrus County was under a flash flood warning.

But none of that mattered when, at about 5:45 p.m., and with the Joe Robinson Quartet providing just the right kind of light and airy jazz, the sun actually came out.

"I told it come out," said Qadirah in a way that made you believe she meant it. "And it listened."

While the sun was taking orders from Qadirah, a growing Rowan County crowd was taking in some excellent jazz and blues.

Robinson, who plays trumpet for his band, teamed with Winston-Salem -- by way of Canada -- flutist Brenda Morie to create a jazz masterpiece with their rendition of Van Morrison's "Moondance."

Morie, blessed with a smoky, melodic voice supplied vocals for several songs. But it was her dreamy and timely -- and, dare one say, sexy -- work with the flute that carried the set.

Between Robinson's group wrapping up at about 8 p.m., and the arrival of the headline act, Big Jack Johnson and the Oilers, the crowd was entertained by Mitch Capel (and his alter ego Granddaddy Junebug), one of four storytellers who performed between musical sets.

Capel dedicated his performance to the memory of several "black storytellers" but most prominently to the recently deceased former Rowan County resident Jackie Torrence.

"She was bad," said Capel. He compared her to sports great Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods and Lance Armstrong, as one of those who dominated their professions.

"That's what Jackie Torrence was for storytelling," Capel said. "And I'm humbled to be able to stand on her shoulders."

Then it was Big Jack Johnson time.

Johnson, who studied under legend B.B. King, showed the crowd -- which had swelled to more than 1,000 by then -- what blues electric guitar what all about.

After an opening number, Johnson broke into something he called the "Salisbury Boogie," whose guitar riffs could be called flat out funky.

"No that's not funky," said Qadirah. "That's blues, baby. That even past blues, that's bluesy blues."

And luckily for Qadirah and the hundreds who came out for the festival, that's what the skies were, too. ■

By Lee Ann Sides Garrett

Salisbury Post - Published October 14, 2007

Children bobbed their heads and parents tapped their feet. Hundreds gathered at the corner of Fisher and Church streets Saturday for an evening of blues and jazz. The ninth annual Blues and Jazz Festival went from noon to 11 p.m. The event, put on by the Rowan Blues and Jazz Society, began with young talent, such as the Knox Middle School Jazz Band and Triad Youth Jazz Society, then progressed to established talent from all over the area.

Those attending sat on lawn chairs they'd brought or hay bales set out around the parking lot. Or they stood soaking up the relaxed atmosphere and enjoying food such as turkey legs and Caribbean cuisine. The event brought out

listeners of all ages, from children to adults, some with pets.

"Jazzy Strings," performed by the Mountain Marionettes, delighted young and old alike. The marionettes built and operated by Susan VanderWheghe performed to Dixieland, Ragtime and Big Band music.

"I love bringing this music to kids," VanderWheghe said. As the afternoon turned into evening, the crowd became larger in anticipation of performers including Joe Robinson and Salisbury's own Bob Paolino.

Special guest emcee and storyteller Mitch Capel -- also known as Granddaddy Junebug -- kept the audience entertained with stories and jokes between sets.

Salisbury resident Jim Schaeffer said he and his wife attended just to see what was going on. They saw the flyer

for the event in a restaurant and went straight to it.

"This is great," said Schaeffer. "I love jazz. I listen to it all the time on my computer."

Guest performer Charlene Williams joined Joe Robinson on stage performing "All of Me" and had Shirahba Rasheed swaying in her chair. She drove from Charlotte for the event.

"I listen to jazz everyday," Rasheed says. "These are some great performers. I'm impressed."

After dark, listeners enjoyed performances by the Matt Walsh Band featuring Matt Hill with Steady Rollin' Bob Margolin as a special guest. Zachary Smith and the Dixie Power Trio ended the event with the sounds of Dixieland/rock and roll. ■

Jackie Torrence - Salisbury

Letter to the Editor Published - April 12, 2003

I read the wonderful letter by J. Foster Owens (MArch 26), asking for Rowan County citizens to help provide funding for the symphony. My first touch with the symphony was in my early years of elementary school. It was a performance of "Peter and the Wolf" and, later, the "Grand Canyon Suite."

To this day the sound of the symphony causes me excitement and anticipation for the sounds of the stories that the music can tell. Bravo! Long live the symphony!

This letter is also a reminder of a form of art that needs more friends. For five years now, a small group of dedicated people has worked very hard to keep the blues and jazz alive -- the Rowan Blues and Jazz Society. They celebrate the pure, American-born music.

Last October, the Blues and Jazz Festival featured Bowling Green John Cephas and Harmonica Phil Wiggins. These men are celebrated in Europe for their Piedmont Blues style music. Our festival grounds were not representative of the crowd that should have been there to hear these great musicians. This year, the society wants to bring another great representative of the American tradition to Rowan. They need your help. They need membership and folks who will help support the blues and jazz with funding.

They want to keep the festival free to the public, give workshops in the schools and put nationally known performers to work with local musicians.

If you are interested, please see the Web site www.rowanbluesandjazz.com or call 704-636-3277. ■

By Shavonne Potts

Salisbury Post - Published July 18, 2007

The Rowan Blues and Jazz Society hopes that a weekend jam session for youths will grow into a regular event.

Just as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie jammed in their day, so did the group made up of middle- and high-school students last weekend at Miller Recreation Center.

"The students got to meet others with the same interests as them," said Eleanor Qadirah, founder of the Blues and Jazz Society.

She said one student only played rock music, but he was able to experience something different.

"The idea is to encourage them if they want to go further," Qadirah said. The group will meet once or twice a month to jam as well as perform in local events.

As participation grows, the organization hopes to include educational programs and musician mentoring for the youth ensemble, she said.

"I do want it to be an educational experience maybe to discuss the relationship to jazz, blues and gospel," Qadirah said.

A few of the students from this past weekend's session were chosen to perform Saturday in Lexington.

The group will perform at noon at the Banks-Miller American Legion Post No. 255.

Up next for the organization is its Ninth Annual Blues and Jazz Festival in downtown Salisbury in October. ■

By Katie Scarvey, Salisbury Post

Salisbury Post - Published October 2, 2003

The availability of good live music, especially blues and jazz, is one of Salisbury's best-kept secrets.

The Rowan Blues and Jazz Society, however, would like to get the word out, and they hope that this year's festival will accomplish just that.

Headliners for this year's show are the well-known Piedmont blues duo John Cephas and Phil Wiggins.

The fifth annual Blues and Jazz Festival will be held at 313 S. Main St. in downtown Salisbury (the parking lot of the Rowan Health and Fitness Center) Saturday, Oct. 11, from noon to 11 p.m. Cephas and Wiggins will take the stage at 8:15 p.m.

Organizers hope that October Tour participants and theater patrons will stick around the downtown area Saturday afternoon and evening to relax in their comfortable chairs and listen to some good blues.

The festival started with local musicians volunteering to perform and has grown since then. The first year, storyteller Jackie Torrence teamed up with Bob Paolino to perform an excerpt from "Blues Story." Torrence will return this year to introduce blues greats Cephas and Wiggins, with whom she toured to perform "Blues Story."

Torrence met the bluesmen through her agent. On her way to a gig with Cephas and Wiggins -- she was a last-minute replacement -- Torrence discovered that the duo played a song called "Two White Horses." Coincidentally, Torrence had a story called "Two White Horses" in her repertoire. The three of them performed it that night.

"It went over big," Torrence says. The success of that experience inspired Torrence to write "Blues Story," which she debuted with Cephas and Wiggins in London and performed around the country.

"They're two fantastic musicians," she says. "I hate that I can't do Blues Story with them anymore. We had a good time doing it."

The duo has gotten the highest award in blues, the W.C. Handy Award, for their 1987 album, "Dog Days of August."

John Cephas, the older member of the duo, plays the guitar. "His voice has that long, country wail about it that makes you want to listen," Torrence says.

"And Phil, the harmonica player...he can do anything with that harmonica."

"Salisbury missed out on them last year," she says. "A lot of people didn't show up. I hope people will come out these year because they're incredible. They give a wonderful show."

Festival organizer Eleanor Qadirah, one of Salisbury's most fervent supporters of blues and jazz, helped organize the Rowan Blues and Jazz Society in 1999. Like Torrence, she believes that locals shouldn't miss the chance to see two living blues legends who are beloved around the world.

"I'd like Salisbury to realize what it has," Qadirah says. "We've got the makings of a major festival here to go along with the rest of the festivals."

People from out of the area often express amazement that the Rowan County festival is free to the public, she says. Blues and jazz festivals often charge thirty or forty dollars for admission.

Unfortunately, this year's event will probably be the last free festival, Qadirah says, unless local businesses become more committed to sponsorship.

The society is still looking for businesses and individuals to sponsor the stage, the sound system and the performers.

Also performing

Besides Cephas and Wiggins, there are plenty of other acts to keep the downtown parking lot jumping, including trumpet-player and singer-songwriter Joe Robinson of Clemmons.

Robinson began playing the trumpet at the age of 13, inspired by the sounds of Miles Davis and Chet Baker. He has played in a rhythm and blues band called Gore and the Upsetters and later, the Eliminators and the Bill Bright Jazz Quintet. Eventually, Robinson formed his own group, the Joe Robinson Quartet, which played frequently at the Cellar in Winston-Salem. That led to the release of his first CD, "Better Late than Never," an album of cover songs which received lots of local airplay in Winston-Salem as well as Raleigh/Durham. The interest that generated led to performances at several large blues festivals and a CD of original compositions called "Movin' On."

Tite Fit, a Charlotte-based band that plays "rockin' Texas Blues" will also be on hand, as will the Morganton-based band Bluesville, performing their distinctive brand of contemporary blues. Garrett ("Big Leg Hambone") Nowicki, the band's harmonica player, is from Salisbury.

Bluesville has performed for the summer concert series sponsored by Raleigh's Parks and Recreation Arts Program and at the Historic Morganton Festival. They've also played at the House of Blues at Myrtle Beach.

Band member Sandy Blair says that Bluesville tries to deliver "heartbreaking, home-wrecking, soul-searching, life-changing blues."

Cle Thompson, a native of Chicago who has developed a large following since she moved to Winston-Salem several years ago, will perform her brand of passionate, soulful jazz.

Reggie Buie, who has opened for The Manhattans and Kool & the Gang, will also perform.

Performing at 1:30 p.m. will be the Salisbury High School Jazz Band, under the direction of second-year band director Brad Gulley.

"They're our only auditioned group," he says. Students try out in the spring and are assigned a chair based on their performance.

Improvisation is a focus, Gulley says. "Everyone does a solo at one time or another. I teach the basic framework, and we improvise almost every day."

Gulley inherited a small jazz program at the school and expects continued growth with committed leadership.

He credits the Knox Middle School band program, led by Sam Kyzer, with "lighting a fire" under his middle school musicians. Gulley intends to fan the jazz flames and keep enthusiasm strong at the high school level.

He also wants the community to know that his student jazz group is available and eager to play for community events.

The festival is sponsored by CCB, Days Inn, First Bank, F&M Bank, Sagebrush, the City of Salisbury, Granite Knitwear, Escape the Daily Grind, Carillon Assisted Living, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, the Rowan Health and Fitness Center, Club Zidis and Rowan Business Forms.

Vendors will be on hand to sell food and cold beverages. There will be turkey legs, funnel cakes, curly fries, corn dogs, blooming onions, barbecued pork and chicken, fried fish and cold beer.

Flags, bags, ethnic jewelry, clothing and glass items will be available. The Salisbury store Sista to Sista will have a booth of African art for sale, and festival T-shirts will also be available for purchase. The Rowan Blues and Jazz Society will raffle off a 1996 Mercury Sable during the festival. ■

Have your favorite artists autographs for life.