

Swinging Jazz Act Will Take You Back!

LOCAL BAND: *Midnight Serenaders*

BY BARBARA MITCHELL

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Portland's Midnight Serenaders — Pete Lampe (rear, from left), David Evans, Dee Settlemier, Henry Bogdan, Garner Pruitt and Doug Sammons (foreground) — will be in their element tonight at Tony Starlight's.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that the Midnight Serenaders' brand-new album was a long-lost relic from the first part of the 20th century, rescued from a dusty 78 and restored to its former glory.

This band of seasoned musicians has essentially done just that with the release of "Magnolia," reviving lost classics from the vintage jazz era while keeping the inherent giddiness of that time perfectly intact.

There's a boozy, bluesy sensibility to the band's music — a speak-easy savvy that's enhanced by Dee Settlemier's clear and dusky vocals; Pete Lampe's upright bass; the woozy trumpet, clarinet and saxophone of Garner Pruitt and David Evans; and Henry Bogdan's tasteful Hawaiian steel guitar. Co-vocalist and guitarist Doug Sammons adds a jauntiness to the proceedings.

Songs like "The World's Crazy About Jazz" and "Dirt Dishin' Daisy" will make you long for a simpler time when raised hemlines could raise eyebrows. Get out your Sunday best and catch the band at the perfectly appropriate setting of Tony Starlight's.

Midnight Serenaders: Vision Taps Vintage Vein!

by Don Campbell

Wednesday, January 9, 2008

The Oregonian A & E



There's a risk in playing vintage music, be it blues, jazz or country. Being dynamic, music is best served fresh and freshly inspired.

Doug Sammons, a New York rocker turned bluegrass and old-time musician, turned his latest musical epiphany into a swinging sextet that marries the best parts of old country -- a la Jimmy Rodgers and lap steel guitars -- to the swing era of the 1920s and '30s. The 3-year-old Midnight Serenaders, who play Saturday at Mississippi Studios, includes some of Portland's better jazz players, who Sammons has rallied around the vintage swing flag.

"I just started discovering people and finding these songs," he says. "It's come together based on this idea of a sound I have, this Jimmy Rodgers sound, but it's morphing."

Hawaiian steel player and group co-founder Henry Bogdan, former bassist for '90s rock band Helmet, plays large in Sammons' sound. Copping trombone parts from early arrangements is his starting point in a lot of the Serenaders' material. The band, which has released the CD "Magnolia," features strong vocals from Sammons and singer Dee Settlemier, who also adds ukulele, banjo and guitar. The sound is rounded out with former New Orleans saxman and clarinetist David Evans, Garner Pruitt on trumpet and vocals, and Pete Lampe (of Pete's Bass Shop) on upright. The members favor period-appropriate attire, but it's the red-hot swing that's bringing in growing numbers of dancers. "In my career I've played angry rock music," Sammons says, "and sad bluegrass and old time. Now I'm playing happy music. It's great see to smiles on people's faces."

WILLAMETTE WEEK THURSDAY, MAY 18 MIDNIGHT SERENADERS

It's love at first set with this newfangled, old-fashioned ensemble.

[ROOTS] For the past five Thursday evenings, over slices, salad and pints at homey, all-ages Mississippi Pizza, a swell new band has been quietly building a following. This past week, the restaurant's big music room filled up early with a charmingly multigenerational crowd, from toddlers to retirees, abuzz—a gentle, entry-level kind of buzz—about the Midnight Serenaders, a delightful addition to Portland's thriving roots-music landscape.

They're a supergroup of a strange sort: Leader Doug Sammons is known from his days with beloved bluegrass combo Sam Hill, bassist Laura Quigley is a member of the equally esteemed Misty River, and—here's the wild card—Portland-raised guitarist Henry Bogdan played bass for '90s alt-heavies Helmet before falling hopelessly in love with Hawaiian steel guitar. They're joined by accomplished bluegrass banjo player Mike Stahlman, here revisiting the tenor banjo he first played as a child, as well as jazz-klezmer clarinetist Sammy Epstein (of the Mazel Tov Orchestra) and trumpeter Dean Comley.

Visually, at least, this sextet divides handily onstage into three pairings: Up front and to the audience's left, Sammons and Quigley stand, play and sing; to the right, seated, Bogdan and Stahlman hunch over their instruments; and perched on stools on the back line, Epstein and Comley wiggle around or pull faces when not busy playing. The band is turned out in spiffy vintage style, befitting their grab bag of vintage tunes from jazz, country and blues to Tin Pan Alley pop, with the occasional Hawaiian instrumental.

To date, the Serenaders have performed fewer than 20 shows together, and Comley's still a recent addition to the lineup. So, beyond simply building word of mouth, the two-sets-a-night, six-week Mississippi Pizza residency ending this week has helped them tighten up and begin to stretch out. Bogdan attests that "having to play every song we know, once a week" has been a boon for the group. "It takes a long time to get a band off the ground," he continues, knowingly. "Once everyone has their confidence, when you're not worrying about what note comes next, then you can really start playing."

—JEFF ROSENBERG.

Some Past Performances	
Mississippi Studios	Tony Starlight's Supper Club
Portland Rose Festival	Duff's Garage
Jimmy Mak's	McMenamin's Edgefield
Alberta Street Public House	McMenamin's Kennedy School
Bite of Oregon Festival	Portland Lindy Exchange
The Fez Ballroom	Doug Fir Lounge
Meinig Park Concert Series	Portland Parks Concert Series
Axe & Fiddle	Willamette Valley Music Fest.
Laurelthirst Pub	Mississippi Street Fair
Ms. Kitty's Parlour	Crystal Ballroom
Alberta Street Fair	Cascade Head Music Fest.
Think Swing Jazz & Blues Fest.	Kruger's Farm Concert Series
Salem Art Festival	Someday Lounge

COMMENTS

"I became absolutely addicted to certain songs and had to force myself to listen to something else... wonderful music played by exceptional musicians."

Mary Burlingame, KMHD Radio

"...this combo not only brings the charm of vintage jazz and swing but the spirit, the background and all of the wonderful connotations and quirks to boot.

CD Baby

"Have just received your CD 'Magnolia' and absolutely love it. What a refreshing approach and sound."

Brian Harvey, "Hot Jazz Channel" Online Radio UK

"The Midnight Serenaders perform some valuable feats of song archaeology on their recently released debut disc, Magnolia, unearthing droll and charming tunes from the 1920's and 30's and dusting them off with good spirits and musical precision."

Jeff Rosenberg, Willamette Week

"The minute the Midnight Serenaders take the stage in their vintage suits and dresses, you know you are in for a treat! Tuneful playing and sensational singing take you on a toe-tapping trip right back to the 1930's & 40's."

Miz Kitty of Miz Kitty's Parlour Vaudeville Show

"It's love at first set with this newfangled, old-fashioned ensemble."

the Willamette Week

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