

Crossroads

Where Art, Music, and Community bring change

By Kim Thomas



Community Matters By Marty Clifford

North Limestone street party/mural/dedication accomplished all that was set out to accomplish and more. WOW, GREAT, SUCCESSFUL does not seem to be able to describe it.

The Kentucky Historical Society was there to record the history / culture of our community. Musicians and family—recorded; Gentrys, Madisons, Allens, Richardson and Romanowitz.

It was great hearing and seeing these guys play; Gentry's daughter on flute, Courtney Allen on keyboard and Byron Romanowitz on sax. Byron started playing at fourteen, in some places he was not suppose to be, but the only places he could have the opportunities to play and learn jazz. Our community at one time was rich with music and it was great to see the people enjoying it again in the streets for the whole community.

Mike Burrell—the mural artist, who had done a lot of research into our music culture described the mural as the kids out front inviting the viewers into the future of diversity that music brings—who are most likely in there 60s now looking back. He also explained how music has and is able to break racial barriers as well as other human self created barriers.

The community event started in the day and went into the night, full of music played by a diverse group and groups (jazz, blues, blue grass, Southern Rock and Moroccan—some mixed with contemporary scratching). Dance (Capoeria Studio, Mecca). Belly Dancing and Fire Dancing was a first for a lot in the community who overwhelmingly enjoyed it and most likely raised art awareness and unanimously said they wanted more. The crowd was smiling and greeting each other warmly. The depth of life experiences and richness of the diversity is our community and the reason a lot of us live here.

We want to thank LexArts for the mural. We want to thank Jim Gray, Andrea James and Jim Clark for speaking, and their support. We want to thank MLKNA for their community leadership, example and support. We want to thank Mike Burrell and the musicians and their families for their support and Bryon Romanowitz for playing and for his book *Jazz in Lexington* (which captures a lot of our community's

culture). We want to thank Al's Bar for being, good citizens, good neighbors and community leaders. It has been a busy and rewarding year for North Limestone Community and their involvement in the community; clean ups, monthly meetings (sometimes weekly), Central Sector Meetings, Street Scape Meetings, 2040 Meetings, Limestone beatification—trees, HOBY—youth murals (Leaders of Lex), Back to School with Lex Linc, Park meetings, Mural Meetings, and Street party Meetings. There is an energy and excitement in the community.

An additional Douglas Park fundraiser is scheduled for Sunday, September 28, at Al's Bar. ■

Creating the North Limestone Mural By Micheal Burrell

Depicted in my mural design are actual scenes and people from the North Limestone neighborhood who participated in bringing the music and culture to not only their neighborhood but to Lexington and beyond.

The grouping of kids are at an outside concert with Les McCain on keyboard and Duke Madison on Sax when they turn to see who has come to join them listening and enjoying an afternoon of music. It is you, the viewer, who has been transported back in time, by invitation to join a community. At the top of this work you will see that during World War II 'Stop Over Station' located on Esplanade Street opened to give GIs a nice friendly place to meet locals, have some good food and listen and dance to the music. The Smoke Richardson Band were a local big band who played at Joyland Park, the Phoenix Hotel, Cheapside Park and various other venues in the area. Just below them are Betty Coed and the Debs in 1940. They represent the all women bands which is part of a tradition dating back to the Blue Grass Orchestra of 1907 which featured an all African American Women's Band. Big Bands played at Joyland Park, Cheapside Park and the Lyric Theatre. The Phoenix and Lafayette Hotels besides having big, out of town, Swing and

Bop bands often had local bands perform for private parties.

The top right corner shows a composite inspired by Duke Madison's band playing Jazz, Rhythm and Blues. These small groups performed at venues like the Drake Hotel, Spider Web, Subway Club, Club Hurricane, Wes Bar, Dixieland Dance, American Legion Hall Post #132 and the Zebra Lounge.

Sadly all of these places are gone, but with Al's Bar open for music maybe the start of something old will take root and grow anew.

Just under and to the right of the couple jumping and dancing peeks out the Lyric Theatre where Count Basie, Louie Armstrong, and other big names came to entertain. Often black entertainers came to Lexington but were not allowed to stay at the local hotels that booked them so they stayed with families who opened their doors in hospitality. Any one of these home in the North Limestone area may have hosted some of the greatest musicians America has ever produced. Again Wow!

Just a note of something I realized researching this project: Music was segregated much like the society of Lexington and the country. Through music, white and black musicians started to come together. This happened in this part of town with white cats playing jazz and bop which was frowned upon in their part of town but jazz music started to change things. Jazz came to represent what America stood for during WW II. After the war, white bands were playing jazz, then black bands played it in white venues, then mixed bands and eventually whites and blacks sat together listening to music by black and white composers and players. Just

think, some one like Charles Quilings who taught music and directed the marching band at Dunbar High School fostered and mentored almost all of the young musicians like Les McCain, George Gentry, Duke Madison, Mike and Courtney Allen and many more. They were part of bringing two peoples together. He and his students and those before them pioneered with local white musicians a form of music which once was banned at the University of Kentucky and is now an art form which is now taught there. Wow!

I have met with Byron Romanowitz and bought his book *Jazz in Lexington (a personal view)* which was a great resource for this project. He's included in the mural. I also interviewed Anna Madison wife and window of Duke Madison and Mrs. Gentry. They had some old photos that they let me make copies of for source materials.

While talking to Anna, she told me how they lived in the neighborhood all of Duke's life even after he retired as a postman and he continued to play music. He was known as one of the best to have come out of this area. I talked to Courtney Allen about him and his brother Mike who went to Dunbar High School under Charles Quiling's tutelage. They later became friends and they talk often. Mr. Quilings and his wife have recently moved to Atlanta, Georgia for health reasons and to be close to family. The ladies at the history building were also a big help. I have really gotten caught up in this project and have enjoyed the people who have helped me come to understand a part of this town and its history and culture and importance. KET has a DVD Lexington in the 40s and a Swing music DVD

by The Vince DiMartino and Miles Osland Orchestra.

The neighborhood association informed me of another music tradition that had an outpost here, Bluegrass music! Yes, Bluegrass. Bluegrass music like Jazz and Rhythm and Blues is an American art form. They both feature improvisation and a collective conscience of the band members.

I met with Jessie (mother) and Rosa Crowe (sister) and Russell Farmer (did documentary of JD Crowe) who told me about J.D. Crowe. J.D. Crowe as a boy had gone to see Earl Scruggs play his banjo and he was hooked. His dad took him to Mr. Scruggs for lessons; that was the start seed of the second generation of bluegrass music. J.D. went on the road playing music at 14-years-old. Later in the '60s he decided to stay here in Lexington to play. Where? That's right North Limestone at Martin's, then later in the seventies at the Lime Room on North Limestone, eventually moving to the Holiday Inn North. Like Charles Quillings, J.D. Crowe mentored many younger musicians. They became the third and fourth generation of Bluegrass music.

Through many hours of research, I believe I have acquired an insight into in to the heart of this community. When I look at the kids here in this mural, they look like kids from the neighborhood now. I smile because this picture is from the early fifties. These children are now in their mid-sixties. North Limestone you have History and Traditions to be proud of. I hope this mural will help pass them along to the next generations. ■

Burrell's next mural will be on Southland Drive.

Music in Lexington

By Lori Houlihan

I was very sad to see The Dame go this year, but it never once signaled to me "the end of the Lexington Music Scene."

After living here 20 plus years, I feel I can safely say that I could take on and win an argument against anyone who says there's nothing to do here.

If I have any frustration, it's that I don't have the time to do all the things that I want to do.

Seeing live music is always on my wish list and there is rarely a week that goes by that there isn't something happening in the music scene that I'd like to experience.

It's true that we've had to deal with a summer lacking in "Dame Level" national acts, but I never doubted that even if the Dame didn't rise again, some-

thing would come along eventually to take its place.

In the years I've lived here, I've said Goodbye to Cafe Lmnop, The ThrashCan, The Bottomline, The Wrocklage and Lynagh's Music Emporium, just to name a few.

With all those closings there was always still plenty of music to see. Not that those venues weren't fantastic. They were, but the Lexington Music Scene has always been about the depth of talent we're blessed to have...not just in musicians, but also in sound engineers and booking agents.

And I'd be remiss not to mention the vital role WRFL, WUKY and WRVG (may it rest in Peace) have played in keeping our music scene alive, by including our local bands in their playlists and by bringing both national and international acts into our city to play for us.

The Lexington Music Scene is wounded, but it is alive and kicking. Just this week I saw good live music at Al's, the Singletary Center and the Courthouse Lawn and the week before that it was at CD Central and downtown at the Roots and Heritage Festival.

I have found that if one digs deep and keeps their eyes and ears opened, Lexington will reward them with a treasure trove of auditory delights...maybe even more than they have the time to handle. ■

Downtown Did Not Fall

By Nate Eldridge, Lower 48, NateFX.com

It seems like rather than a loss of activity downtown after the block's destruction, there has been a major increase in downtown entertainment. And, although it is a shame the historic block has been demolished into a pile of rubble, a spark of life has enthralled Lexington. As the owners of Lower 48 (Shawn Sewell, Sarci Steward and myself) dreamed of opening our own establishment for a long number of years, but the absence of opportunity and growth downtown held back our ideas. Now, with a positive shift, the stars have aligned and brought us to the forefront of entertainment in Victorian Square. Not speaking for the other bars that opened there, but I am sure their stories will be similar to ours.

With the recent additions of Lower 48, DeVassa and The Chase Tap Room, Victorian Square is full of movement during the nightlife hours. Considering all of these new bars opened at nearly the same time, we have all become quite good friends or "family" under our new roof. Victorian Square really has something to offer everyone; bars to hang out in, a sports bar, live music, deejays, dancing, hip hop, jazz and a wide variety for food.

As members of the Downtown Entertainment Task Force, the owners of Lower 48 all thought that it would go absolutely nowhere. Like other state or city sanctioned committees of the past, they always seem to talk, try, and lose volition. This time, however, the situation has been different. The task force progressed the entertainment district in Victorian Square, worked on the Cheapside project, provided demographics and statistics to downtown businesses, hired a consulting team for development and are on the forefront of safety issues. It has made us all much more involved with the city and our

downtown, and was definitely a huge resource for us.

Our venue, Lower 48, is already booked up through December with bands ranging from bluegrass to electronic to reggae, and we have deejays late night on the weekend for those who like to tap their feet and shake the ol' money maker. A section of Lower 48 already includes the atrium of Victorian Square, but soon we will encompass live shows out there as well.

I always wanted a bar with a ton of character, a place to get away from the music, but also a room that was loud with sound and bright with moving lights. Lower 48 is all of that. We are all very pleased with our



creation, and after only a few weeks of open business, the public has also been ecstatic about the place.

It is definitely exciting to think about all of the changes

downtown, and knowing that we are a big part of the developments.

The beginning construction of Busters (now with live music) and The Penguin (dueling piano bar) both right next to Victorian Square continues the development to our side of downtown. And, with it being so close to Rupp Arena, The Opera House and Triangle Park, this is truly the new entertainment zone in Lexington.

With the re-emerging of The Dame, major touring acts that we lacked this summer will return.

Natasha's Café has remodeled to add a bar and much more square footage too, booking everything from acoustic to the theatre.

Downtown did not fall with the loss of the block, I think it will intensify to become better than ever... ■

