

Napa Valley Register

By L. PIERCE CARSON, Register Staff Writer Aug 26, 2006

Big band salute at Copia had fingers snappin', toes tappin'

If only for a few hours, America's big band era was lovingly and swingingly revived at Copia Thursday night.

Noted Calistoga jazzman **Larry Vuckovich** assembled 18 first rate musicians from all over the Bay Area for a salute to swing era ensembles fronted by Tommy Dorsey, Woody Herman, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Harry James.

For a couple of hours, veterans of some of this nation's dance bands and jazz ensembles teamed up to provide Napa music lovers — most were of "a certain age" — with songs that carried them through a world war, helped ring in post-war prosperity and launch the baby boom generation, prior to the advent of Elvis and rock 'n' roll.

While a couple of the classy arrangements from guys like Neal Hefti, Sy Oliver, Ray Coniff and Billy Strayhorn could have used a few more rehearsals, the overall program proved a winner for listeners and its originator, **keyboardist Vuckovich**.

The innovative pianoman brought together some really talented "cats" for this initial Copia foray into big band jazz. On trumpet there was Allen Smith, Fred Berry, John Worley and Tom Bertetta. The sax line consisted of heavy hitters like Noel Jewkes, Jules Broussard, Hal Stein and, on baritone, Joe Agro, with Jim Rothermel on lead alto and clarinet (his Goodman tribute, Eubie Blakes' "Memories of You" was so good it brought tears). The trombone section boasted Wayne Wallace, John Gove, Al Bent and Chuck Bennett. In addition to **El Vucko**, the rhythm section featured guitarist Josh Workman, bassist Nat Johnson and one of the youngest members of the tribe, Matt Guggemos on drums.

And somebody everybody was talking about at intermission and beyond was special guest vocalist Jamie Davis, former vocalist with the Count Basie Band. Davis prompted cheers and sustained applause for his Basie-influenced renditions of "Every Day (I Have the Blues)" and "All Right, OK, You Win," songs that rocketed Joe Williams to worldwide prominence. His romantic slant on Cole Porter's "Night and Day" and Ray Noble's "The Very Thought of You" put us in a very relaxed, almost melancholy mood.

The program ranged from a sextet groovin' on Ellington's "Take the 'A' Train" to the modal jazz of McCoy Tyner on **the Vuckovich-arranged "Passion Dance,"** from a silky rendition of Strayhorn's "Satin Doll" to the early bebop of Dizzy Gillespie's "Emanon," which featured a torrid trumpet section and the dueling saxes of Jewkes, Rothermel and Broussard.

The musical reminiscence ended on a high note, with the rousing ensemble marching in place to Goodman's groundbreaking "Bugle Call Rag."

Although the outdoor setting might have presented a set of problems for sound technicians, the mix of instruments was just fine for a slightly breezy and cool Thursday night on the River Concert Terrace.

It'd be nice to invite **Vuckovich and company** to return at some point in the future for a concert indoors. After all, there were some 350 of us on the lawn and terrace Thursday night.

Since the capacity of the indoor auditorium is slightly under 300, a sell-out is almost guaranteed if we all agree to return.