

Bash, Jam and Jazz

by Rich Regent

A Milwaukee neighborhood block party called The Washington Boulevard Bash was held on Saturday, August 28. John Knurr, a retired music teacher and versatile musician, volunteered to provide music for the area event. Host John and hostess Jonnie had all the essentials and fixings ready for their second annual jam and get-together at their beautiful residence on the boulevard.

Around 3:30 p.m. musicians began arriving and John greeted and welcomed everyone to his home. He had a roof top tent with screened sides pitched on his front yard, complemented by plenty of lawn chairs. The outdoor sound system was adequate for the corner location. It was a warm sunny day where the mature trees along the median strip Boulevard, now barricaded to stop vehicle traffic flow, provided spots of shade for this event. Today, even the people outnumbered the bugs.

What do musicians love to do? Play music and talk about music. The musician guests were like the local Who's Who of Jazz and Dixieland. John played his tuba, electronic keyboard, sang and played Kazoo. Peter "Pete" Wood, the voice of Sentry ads, brought his trumpet. Dave Bock played either trumpet or trombone as the group's needs changed. Bruce Yeo was a crowd pleaser on his trombone. Setting the days record for having three incredible washboardists in the same musical setting were Jack Clark, Don Sheskey, and Vince Picciolo, who prefers to stand while playing. Clarinetists Sam Armato, Paul Vrakas and Rich Regent took turns improvising. Banjoists Jimmy Christiaansen and Lisa Edgar, sang songs during their banjo performances. Tubists were Mark Kranz, Tom Los, Greg Kalkhoff, John, and John's student named Jim Nelson, added the bass to the rhythm section. Several musicians brought along their spouses, cameras and extra lawn chairs.

Tunes ranged from a clarinet duet of Sam and Rich playing *It Had to Be You* to a rollicking ensemble rendition of *Doctor Jazz* and *I've Found a New Baby*.

We were hoping that Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett, who lives nearby, would happen by to enjoy the music. He was not spotted and might have been elsewhere busy running for Governor. Friendly residents walking by stood or sat to listen to the wonderful free entertainment. Bash Jam musicians politely shared the audience with a youth tent of rock musician performers who were several hundred feet to the west. The listeners got a workout choosing and walking between musical activities during the afternoon.

John provided tasty snacks, a delicious pork meal, plus more food and beverages for all the musicians.

Lisa, with her sunny smile, suggested strolling - to walk about while playing music around the neighborhood. Folks gladly stopped what they were doing to gather around, watch and listen. We had fun forming a semicircle and synchronizing alternating foot kicks, like chorus line dancers, while playing the last chorus of tunes.

The get-together party during the Bash included chatting about the band groups heard at the recent Bixfest, getting up to date with musicians not seen for a long time, pondering the vitality of live music and encouraging the future of Jazz. Dave reported that the jam lasted past 9:00 p.m., musicians wanted to savor the moment, linger and play live music.