

Posted on Sun, Dec. 28, 2008

Dick Goodwin strikes up the band

Trumpet player Dick Goodwin is the goto man for Columbia's music scene

By OTIS R. TAYLOR JR.
otaylor@thestate.com

The band rehearsed just once, the day of the show.

But the conductor knew what he was doing, as did the rhythm section. And the piano player was terrific.

So was Aretha Franklin, who turned out to be a fine piano player herself.

"The couple that she played on were not easy tunes, and they weren't in easy keys," Dick Goodwin says of Franklin's performance at the 3 Rivers Music Festival in 2006.

In the midst of her set, though, Franklin suddenly walked off stage, presumably to catch her breath. That's when the audience got to see how good the band, partly put together by Goodwin, really was.

"It took the conductor by surprise, so he called a standard jazz tune" — Benny Golson's "Killer Joe," Goodwin says. "And we faked it.

"We didn't have any other music to play while she was gone."

A melodic trumpet player, Goodwin soloed, as did the pianist and a saxophonist.

"(The conductor) pointed to the organist, who held up his hands" to say "not me," Goodwin recalls with a laugh that would be described less as hearty than as a polite cackle.

After more than 30 years directing, playing and writing music in Columbia, Goodwin has plenty of stories like that one.

It's a perk for being a goto guy.

Love, Hate Relationship

"I still get nervous," Goodwin says, fiddling with his trumpet backstage at the Koger Center before the

conferring of USC doctoral degrees earlier this month. He was about to take the stage with the faculty brass quintet.

"The thing I hate worst is being on stage, but the thing I love best is playing."

Goodwin, 67, a man with a soft, neighborly face, has been playing — not just trumpet, but piano and bass, too — since junior high school.

He was a band director in the Coast Guard and directed the University of Texas jazz studies program for 10 years before moving to USC in 1973.

He's taught theory and composition and started a doctoral program in composition. He directed the USC Symphony for "five or six years," he says, and arranged music for the marching band for more than two decades.

Can you hum USC's fight song or alma mater? Those are Goodwin's arrangements.

Goodwin "sort of retired" in 2000, but next semester he'll teach a course.

And of course, he'll always play when asked.

Ron Davis, a tuba professor, warms up backstage before the commencement with a tickled run.



“That’s mighty pretty,” Goodwin tells him.

“You can use that lick if you want,” Davis responds.

“I can use anything I can get,” Goodwin says without having to wink.

He waits for the quintet’s other trumpet player to walk out first, even though the band looks to him before beginning.

“The National Anthem is in A flat,” Goodwin says.

He doesn’t look so nervous.

Goto Man

If a touring act or local performance needs musicians — strings, brass, rhythm, anything — there’s only one person to call: Dick Goodwin.

Goodwin was commissioned to write a piece commemorating Columbia’s musical history for the opening gala at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center in 2004.

The piece had a rendition of “Stars and Stripes Forever” (its composer, John Philip Sousa, once performed at the Township), a country ditty and, of course, snippets of Hootie and The Blowfish.

When Ray Charles performed at the 3 Rivers Music Festival in 2001, Goodwin organized the band — and played with Charles.

It wasn’t the greatest show — Charles famously asked that bands on other festival stages stop playing during his set — but it remains memorable.

“I could hear the bands two blocks away, and he was really upset about it,” Goodwin recalls. “He wasn’t getting what he wanted from the monitor, and I don’t think people were getting what they had hoped for out front.”

When the Temptations play at the Newberry Opera house Feb. 24, Goodwin will perform with them, too.

One of his favorite playing experiences — outside of Texas and Oklahoma, states he toured with Henry Mancini — was with Natalie Cole. “It was right after that ‘Unforgettable’ album,” Goodwin says. “She brought firstcall L.A. studio guys. It was so well done.”

Goodwin also is the goto guy on New Year’s Eve. He’s missed only one since he started playing parties in junior high.

He currently has a longstanding Dec. 31 date at the Newberry Opera House with The Dick Goodwin Big

Band, a 10piece that features singers. He’s been leading the group since he got to Columbia.

“He is such a fine musician, and he has access to some of the great musicians around Columbia,” says Deborah Smith, the opera house’s executive director.

The evening, which draws more than 200 people who dress in black tie, features wine and cheese, champagne and fireworks.

Goodwin will even compose new music for the band to play.

“He’s nothing but a pleasure, which is a rare thing,” Smith says. “In our area, he’s our first main man.”

No. 1, He’s A Composer

Goodwin’s wife, Winifred, a USC staff pianist and the S.C. Philharmonic’s principal keyboardist, peels sweet potatoes in the kitchen.

She’s also making fish for the Goodwin’s dog, Girl, who has a liver condition. Cinders, the couple’s cat, mills around, too. Both showed up at the door of what friends might call the goto house off Rosewood Drive.



Outside the kitchen windows, several birds and squirrels linger on myriad feeders. Oscar Peterson’s Christmas piano music wafts like incense.

Three photos of Winifred, called Winkie by friends, hang on the wall above Goodwin’s desk. He spends a lot of time there, at his keyboard and computer.

“I’m most visible, I’m sure, as a performer, but that’s not the main thing I do,” he says. “I’m a writer.”

Two of the current projects: a tango, “La Cumparsita,” that the S.C. Philharmonic will perform Jan. 10, and 10 arrangements for The Return, a Beatles tribute band that will play with the orchestra March 3.

“He’s kind of the goto person if an arrangement doesn’t exist for the orchestra,” says Rhonda Hunsinger, the philharmonic’s executive director.

Sometimes players will lobby Goodwin for some concert shine.

“Usually they’re polite about it,” he says. “But I’m really sensitive. I know ’em all.

“I want to give each one of them something that’s really special to them in concert.”

Goodwin has been working with the S.C. Philharmonic since he came to Columbia, playing upright bass for a few years. He now subs for players and was the fillin director for about a year before Einar W. Anderson was hired in 1982.

So why doesn’t he perform regularly with the philharmonic?

“OK, I’ll confess: I don’t concentrate well enough,” he says. “I hear something going on over here, and I’m interested in that.

“In the meantime, I’m supposed to be counting rests.”

Goodwin’s been writing more for the philharmonic since it named Morihiko Nakahara music director earlier this year, Hunsinger says.

“I was really pleased that we asked (Nakahara) and pleased that he accepted,” Goodwin says. “He is personable and interested in the pop culture. “I think that’s crucial.”

Goodwin also writes music for the Columbia Jazz Orchestra, what he calls a kicks band.

“We don’t do it for the money. We do it for the kicks,” Goodwin says of the band, which plays every other Monday at Speakeasy in Five Points.

Robert Gardiner, the jazz orchestra’s band leader and saxophonist, says Goodwin has an indefatigable presence.

“Dick is a jack of all trades,” Gardiner says. “He does a lot with every aspect of the music business.

“He’s just an allaround great musician.”

Gardiner calls Goodwin’s melodic playing tasty.

“He’s not trying to impress you with his technique. He ’s trying to play interesting melodies.”

He may consider himself more of a writer, but staying sharp for audiences — so his nerves will be somewhat calm — is why he plays his trumpet daily.

“Playing is always on the edge,” Goodwin says. “If it weren’t, it wouldn’t be any fun.”

