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Great sounds expected from jazz festival

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Written by
For The Spectrum

MESQUITE - Bellevue, Wash., residents Bert and Rose Marie Barr travel around the world seeing sites while playing in a jazz band called Uptown Lowdown. Their thousands of miles of travel have included engagements on cruise ships, the Panama Canal, Japan, Mexico, Holland and Germany along with stops all over the United States.

The Barr's band will be among those featured this weekend when the inaugural Mesquite Jazz Festival is presented at the CasaBlanca Resort.

"We're really looking forward to it," said Bert Barr, a native of Vallejo, Calif., who has lived in Oregon since enrolling at the University of Oregon in 1966. "We stress the emphasis on the classical New Orleans style of jazz from the 1920s with performers like Louie Armstrong as opposed to Dixieland."

If it is true that music keeps a person young, the 67-year-old Barr seems 20 years younger probably because of his never-ending schedule.

"It definitely keeps me young and also keeps your mind active," he said. "Rose Marie and I also have a small shop on our property where we do home furnishings upholstery, so we stay busy."

Bert Barr's interest in traditional jazz actually began in grammar school in Vallejo where he started playing the trumpet. At the University of Oregon in 1966, he started the Emerald City Jazz Band while also earning a degree in music before moving in 1971 to Seattle where he started the Lowdown Jazz Band.

Rose Marie plays the piano. Whether laying a hot ragtime number or a sultry love ballad, she is at home behind the piano performing in wedding ceremonies, wedding receptions, fashion shows, background music of all kinds, senior living residences while also playing an important role with the Uptown bands which concentrate on Ragtime, Dixieland and swing music.

Other band members include Paul Woltz, a former southern Californian now living in Lynnwood, Wash., who plays the soprano and bass sax; Art Horgen, another Lynnwood resident who plays the tuba; Al La Tourette, a banjo player from Bellevue, Wash., and Tom Jacobus of Kent, Wash., who plays the trombone.

The group's web site www.uptownlowdownjazz.com is filled with compliments from fans that have enjoyed the group. The list of scheduled events following the Mesquite Jazz Festival is proof that the Barrs have a big following.

The schedule at the CasaBlanca will include 40-minute sets starting at 1:30 p.m. Friday in the CasaBlanca Showroom. Sally's Jazznuts Band will kick off festivities followed by the Titanic Jazz Band at 2:30 p.m.; the Barr's Uptown Lowdown at 3:30; and the Reynolds Brothers Rhythm Rascals at 4:30.

Forty-five minute sets begin with the same bands starting at 7 p.m.

On Saturday the Barrs explore the history of jazz beginning at 10 a.m. with music also presented by other groups throughout the day and ending at about 11 p.m.

The Grand Finale Sunday will include a Gospel Hour starting at 9 a.m. to be followed by Sally's Jazznuts, Uptown Lowdown, Titanic Jazz Band and the Reynolds Brothers Rhythm Rascals.

Further information can be found by visiting www.mesquitejazz.com or www.jazznuts.com; by calling Sally McKay at 760-754-7081; or by calling the CasaBlanca at 877-438-2829.

One, two and three-day festival passes are available starting at \$25 and may be purchased at www.mesquitejazz.com.