

# Making Music, Southern Style

## The spirit of Dixieland jazz brings joy to Bill Logozzo's heart

By Alicia B. Smith

The thrill of high speed had kept this man going for years, until the realization was made that adrenaline can come from other activities, activities that were a little more low-key, relaxing and far less dangerous.

And so Bill Logozzo took up an interest he had for most of his life. He gave up racing speed boats and took up the drums. He turned his attention to Dixieland jazz and it has become a constant source of joy for him.

During the day, Mr. Logozzo can be found at the Nutmeg Chrome Corporation, the business he owns on Vanderbilt Avenue. On evenings and throughout many weekends he and a hand-selected group of five performers can be found with their toes tapping, making joyful music as part of the Heartbeat Dixieland Jazz Band.

His initial drum lessons were frustrating at first because he "wanted to be a good player right away." The drums were an instrument Mr. Logozzo said that he always wanted to learn if he ever took up an instrument.

So at the age of 50, he began taking lessons from some of the best drummers in the area, including Gene Bozzi of the Hartford Symphony.



Members of the Heartbeat Dixieland Jazz Band are (from left) Andy Sherwood, Dom Perrone, Al Brogden and Bill Logozzo — Photos by Shari Lucas

His lessons continued and he practiced along with records, but knew that "you learn a lot faster out in the real world." Having convinced some music teacher friends of his to let him play along in their performances, Mr. Logozzo was better able to grasp the right way to play his instrument.

"I grew with it," he said of his skill.

Just four years ago, he was asked by a musician friend to work with him on a performance. Since then, Mr. Logozzo has taken up gigs of his own.

Through his lessons and performances he has gotten to know a number of musicians, many who, like himself, love Dixieland jazz. Drawing from a pool of about 35 musicians, Mr. Logozzo is able to put his band together for performances.

All that is needed are six performers. Mr. Logozzo on drums in joined by three musicians playing a woodwind instrument, trumpet and trombone, in addition to a base (stand-up or tuba) and some sort of rhythm instrument such as piano, banjo or guitar.

"You can do with one of those or double up," Mr. Logozzo said, "but that is basically the core of the group."

Recently he came across an article that said people who play a musical instrument are less likely to have a heart attack.

"There might be something to that," Mr. Logozzo said, thinking of the years he has been performing. Of the musicians he regularly works with, he said he has never had one cancel due to an illness.

"There seems to be less illness in general," he added.

"Everybody wants to play with this band because we have fun," he said. "I will not allow anything else."

Many of the musicians who join him live throughout New England and the band travels throughout the state for performances. Many of the performers, like himself, work full time and play on the side, while the rest are full-time musicians.

The concept seems odd at first, but Mr. Logozzo assured that it works. Among the many venues where he has performed are church services.

While the quick, upbeat tempo does not at first seem to lend itself to a religious service, he said his band "never

had a situation where we don't win them over," referring to the audience.

"People love music," Mr. Logozzo said. "It's a happy music, it gets closer to your soul."

Performing as part of a church service is one way Mr. Logozzo has found to give something back to the community in a spiritual way. He views it as his gift to the church and is willing to play just for the sheer joy of performing. He lets the church determine the fee for the band.

"It's something I want to give," he said.

Crowds of all ages can be won over with Dixieland and audiences young and old can find something in his music to relate to.

"You can see it in their eyes," Mr. Logozzo said. "It's a communication that goes on, all the barriers fall.

"It is communication between the players and the audience.

There is happiness and joy. It's a wonderful place to be whether you are participating or listening."

In recent years a resurgence in swing music has peaked the interest of the younger set. Mr. Logozzo said that both Dixieland and swing music evolved out of one another, with Dixieland being a slightly older form of music.

His concerts often include a variety of musical styles as a way to show the progression of music through history. His band may start off playing a little bit of ragtime, move on to New Orleans-style Dixieland and then incorporate some swing pieces and even rock 'n' roll.

Among some of the tunes in his repertoire are "The Saints (Come Marching In)," "Won't You Come Home Bill Bailey" and some Glen Miller pieces.

"It's like a direct heartbeat to your soul," the drummer said of the music he plays.

The variety of music is one of the many reasons why Linda French, executive director of the West Hartford Chamber of Commerce, has hired Mr. Logozzo and his band to perform at several chamber events.



"The play Dixieland and old music," said Mrs. French. "That is why it's so good for Cruise Night," when dozens of classic cars are displayed along LaSalle Road.

Mrs. French has known Mr. Logozzo for many years: her husband, Bill, used to play baseball with him and their children grew up together. The band also performed at the neighborhood block party where she lives.

"Music is his absolute love," Mrs. French said. "It shows in the care he takes and the quality he puts out."

At the age of five, Bill Logozzo and his family moved to town from Meriden. Throughout his school years, up until graduation from the old Hall High School (now Town Hall) in 1956, he was involved in sports, rather than music.

A friend from town recently informed him that he still holds the batting record from the first baseball league here. He also plays racquetball and skis. For some 15 years, he coached Little League.

For many years he raced speed boats and from 1972-1976 he was a driver on the crew of his boat "The Nutmegger." The crew traveled throughout the country, Canada and Mexico racing their boat.

In 1986, his team, which holds 12 speed records, won a world championship in Littleton, NH. The team was elected to the Boating Hall of Fame.

"When you flip a boat, it's a disaster," Mr. Logozzo said. "Music is a better way to find joy."

Despite giving up boat racing, he continues his interest in antique cars and deep-sea fishing. Presently, Mr. Logozzo is trying to find a way to "reduce my time with the company to increase my time with the music."

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