

THE MUSICAL MEDICS DOCTORS BAND

This band was founded circa 1953 by Dr. Noel Smith (Smitty), a 300 pound jovial Irishman, with a great sense of humour and a love of music. The objective was to be a predominately medical hobby band, created for the enjoyment of the players and whomever might be persuaded to listen.

The founding members included the following:

- Dr. Noel Smith - Tenor Sax - Leader and Raconteur
- Dr. Tom Melling - Drums
- Dr. Leo Robutka - Trumpet
- Dr. Frank Lundy - Banjo and Guitar
- Dr. John Mahon - Trombone
- Dr. Art Follet - Euphonium
- Dick Tregillis - CFCN Radio Station - Trumpet
- Don Rathbun - Bank Manager - Piano
- Don McKeague - Pharmacist - Trombone
- Jimmy Jackson - Violin
- Gordon Carter - Trumpet
- Bill Hames - Trumpet
- Dr. John Porter - Trombone

Dr. Mahon, Dr. Follet, Dr. Porter and Dr. Melling dropped out of the band after a year or so - the following members were added during the following 2 - 3 years:

- Dr. John Birrell - Drums
- Bill Rook - Pharmacist - Alto Sax
- Earl Gillespie - School Principal - Bass
- Bill Strachan - Merchandiser - Alto Sax

The following “members” were always available when needed:

- Tom Dickson - Tenor Sax
- John Hucul - Sax
- Jackie Ryan - Clarinet - Baritone Sax
- George Wilkie - Sax (had his own small group)

The first rehearsal was in December 1953 in Tom Melling’s home. Smitty was the first pianist but very much wanted to play sax. Don Rathbun joined the group and played piano, thus allowing Smitty to play his beloved sax. Rehearsals were held weekly in our various homes, where our wives supplied gourmet food during our rehearsal break. Our library seemed to expand at a steady pace and consisted of many standards including numerous big band arrangements which gave us the Big Band sound. Don Rathbun orchestrated several very good arrangements. One of the unique features of our rehearsals was what Smitty called his “Liquid Tone Improver” - we never could understand why louder didn’t necessarily equate with better.

Our music stands were designed by Dick, and Smitty persuaded the hospital carpenter shop to put them together.

We seemed to be enjoyed and appreciated by many in the community who had an awareness and appreciation for fine music. We seemed to be constantly rehearsing for new performances - a situation which we quite enjoyed - or was it the "Tone Improver", good camaraderie and good food?

It is difficult to recall many of our performances, but here are a few:

- School of Nursing Socials - in one of these sessions the hospital put on their version of My Fair Lady and the band provided the music.
- Doctors Curling Club wind up banquets
- Calgary General Hospital Staff Banquets - one of these was at Sam Nichols family estate home above Bowness
- Lions Club District banquet at the Highlander Hotel - the Beatles were in their prime so we all wore wigs!
- We replaced a German band at the senior citizens center below the Calgary General Hospital - we all wore Leiderhosen and appropriate hats
- The Big One - The Great Jubilee Auditorium experience - We were invited by the Calgary Association for Retarded Children to take part in their Variety Show in aid of Calgary's retarded children - in the new Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium - November 27, 1958. The following numbers were played with great skill and enthusiasm, of course, in the absence of "Tone Improver":
 - 720 in the book
 - Marie
 - Sentimental Over You
 - Whispering
 - Sugar Blues
 - Blues on Parade

It must be recorded that no performance of the Musical Medics was completely fulfilled unless we included "Marie" for Don McKeague and "Sugar Blues" for Leo Robotka - plus or minus his "washtub bass".

The following letter written by John Hucul to a friend, describes the mood and events of this great musical occasion....

Thought you might be interested in the record of a 20 minute act by a twelve piece group I played with at the Jubilee Auditorium on the evening of November 27, 1958 at a Benefit Concert for Retarded Children. There was a very good house and we helped to raise a thousand dollars for the unfortunate youngsters. The arrangements are by Tom Dickson, except for the commercial arrangements of "720" and "Blues on Parade". In the band are Dr. Noel Smith, conductor and commentator; Don Rathbun, piano, a Nova Scotia bank manager; Dr. Frank Lundy, banjo and guitar; Dr. John Birrell, drums; Stan Cushing of Jordan's Rugs, tuba; Dr. Art Follett, euphonium; Don McKeague of Dunford Drugs, trombone; Dick Tregillis of CKXL, trumpet; Dr. Leo Robutka, trumpet; self, first sax; Tom Dickson, 3rd sax and clarinet; George Wilkie, 2nd tenor.

The laughs during the commentaries are for comic signs held up by fellows in the band. The laughter and applause during Blues on Parade is for Leo Robutka on his "Thump Tub" an inverted washtub with rope attached to a broom handle and played like a bull fiddle.

We were all dressed in doctors white operating room uniforms and had stethoscopes and other gadgets to check each other with during the commentaries. We had a lot of fun putting our part of the show together and felt quite honored to have the opportunity of playing in the Jubilee Auditorium.

John and Edith Hucul

The Musical Medics may not go down in history as one of the great Big Bands of all time, but for sheer enjoyment, great camaraderie and, as Smitty would say, with a twinkle in his eye and that charming accent "*our music is the sweetest music this side of Heaven!*".

The Musical Medics Doctors band has always been known as "Smitty's Band". Those of us who were privileged to share this experience with him admired this very caring physician, respected leader, raconteur of good Irish humour and provider of the finest Irish "Tone Improver".

He passed away in 1964. Without his inspiration and leadership, the Musical Medics band slipped into oblivion - actually if there had not been a Musical Medics band, there might never have been a Hippocratic Oath Big Band.