

At Home in Sherman & Denison Magazine

Theme: Going in Style

Swingin' with the Sherman Jazz Museum

By Shelby A. Brooks

Not too far from the Austin College campus there stands a former Masonic Lodge, completed in 1924. The building now houses the Sherman Jazz Museum, founded by Bill Collins.

Bill played trumpet in the famous jazz lab bands at the University of North Texas and worked as a musician in Dallas, performing in the pit orchestra for the Dallas Summer Musicals.

But the kids today don't know their history. Bill ushers me into a spacious hall where rows of records fill the walls and tall portraits of jazz greats gaze down on hushed visitors.

"They might know Wynton, but not these other guys," Bill says, stopping to look up at the portraits. The museum is really about young people, especially jazz students.

I visited the museum a number of years ago, but I felt the shift in the air as soon as I stepped inside the door and into the lobby. The museum is a sanctuary for those of us who have jazz engrained in our hearts and minds.

"It's all about preservation and education," says Bill. He cares deeply about having a place where future generations can see what jazz was, what it meant to people, and how it can continue to transform listeners.

The Sherman Jazz Museum captures the essence of jazz in its most extraordinary form. Stepping into the museum is a chance to step back in time to the days of jazz musicians like Maynard Ferguson, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, and Harry James.

Miles Davis once said, "For me, music and life are all about style."

Jazz is irretrievably entangled with life. Close your eyes. Hear the croon of the trumpet, the soft clarity of the vocalist, the delicious rhythms from the drums and bass.

Looking at the trunk where Roy Elridge kept his trumpet and possessions, noticing the worn latches, imagining the incredible music inside that man, I can't help but shiver. In the presence of greatness I am made humble.

One of the rooms I traveled through on the tour housed over 300 records - not counting the records on display in the museum's other rooms! Bill has an eye for catching pieces to add to the museum and takes notice of old records for what they are. Slices of history waiting to be rediscovered.

The museum recently added another room to give proper tribute to jazz vocalists. Ella Fitzgerald sings from an elaborate mural on one wall while lush, painted curtains adorn the other walls, contributing to the jazz club atmosphere.

Jazz is alive and well, thanks to Bill, his wife Susan, and their daughter Cathy (the museum curator). The Sherman Jazz Museum will continue to acquire jazz memorabilia for those avid jazz enthusiasts thirsting after greatness.

For more information, connect with the Sherman Jazz Museum on Facebook. The museum is open on Saturdays or by appointment during the week.