

Music from the Western Reserve opens season with the Dave Banks Big Band

by Mike Telin



“There’s nothing like the sound of a big band,” trumpeter and band leader Dave Banks said during a recent conversation. “And to have a band that’s got that powerhouse kind of sound makes a real impact on the audience.”

On Sunday, September 10 at 5:00 pm at Christ Episcopal Church in Hudson, Music from the Western Reserve will open their season with the Dave Banks Big Band featuring vocalist Sandra Montevideo. A pre-concert chat begins at 4:30. Tickets available [online](#).

I caught up with the Cuyahoga Falls native by Zoom, and began by asking what the audience will hear during “Big Band on Broadway!”

Dave Banks: It's big band music, but everything has a Broadway connection — songs that have either been in a show on Broadway or are about Broadway. Some of them got their start in the movies but ended up on Broadway, so it's an interesting concept.

We're starting with "Strike Up the Band," from the 1927 musical. It's the arrangement that Sammy Nestico did for the Count Basie Orchestra. We're also going to feature popular songs from different Big Bands that are their own arrangements as well as arrangements by some of our guys.

For example, we'll play Don Turoso's new arrangement of *Broadway*, the 1940s jazz standard. Our band is normally sixteen pieces, but we're cutting it down to twelve to fit inside the church, so he's reworked his arrangement for that size group.

We try to play music that is interesting to listen to. It's not in odd meters or crazy things that will make the audience scratch their heads. They're going to recognize most of the things we play. And Sandra Montevideo is one of the finest theatrical singers. She's magnificent in the way that she presents lyrics. So she's gonna be a real treat to hear as well.

MT: How many people are writing music for big bands today?

DB: There's several people out there. Matter of fact, one of the guys that I really enjoy listening to is John Daversa. On his album *Kaleidoscope Eyes: Music of the Beatles*, he's reworked those tunes into the big band jazz idiom and it's fantastic. And of course Gordon Goodwin is another guy out in Los Angeles who's writing some amazing things. We're going to play one of his pieces on the show as well.

MT: How long has the Band been in existence?

DB: I started it back in 2002. Our first job was at the old Chicago's Bar and Grill on State Road in Cuyahoga Falls. They wanted to try some jazz, and so we thought, hey, this would be a good opportunity.

I was out in Las Vegas for 20 years, and when I came back, I wanted to bring together a bunch of friends that I've known since I was growing up and do some music that we all enjoy. So the premise for the band is to bring a little bit of Las Vegas to the Midwest.

MT: I was looking through your list of players. You've got a great pool of musicians to draw from, and big bands are popular in Northeast Ohio.

DB: There's maybe fifteen different bands that are working in the area, and we're all keeping the genre alive. It's nice that the audiences have a great choice of music to go hear.



MT: What first drew you to big band music?

DB: When I was in high school I was asked to be in a community all-star group called the Akron Jazz Workshop, which was led by Roland Paolucci. My other mentor was Bob Feldbush, who had a fantastic high school jazz group called the Goldtones. Matter of fact, we're going to do one of Bob's arrangements on the show.

So those two guys really set my head into the big band style. And of course, when I moved to Las Vegas, being able to sit next to some of the finest players in the world

was something that I'll never forget.

MT: What led you to follow in the style of Doc Severinsen and more so of Maynard Ferguson?

DB: I played Doc's show out in Vegas and it had a huge impact on me as far as how to present things and the type of dedication you need to become a player at a high level. He would finish taping the Tonight Show in Los Angeles and hop on a jet to come to Las Vegas and go right into the Sands Hotel. He'd play the first show, then go up to his dressing room and practice for an hour and a half, then play the second show. He was a practice nut.

The funniest story about Maynard is that he came to Cuyahoga Falls High School, I think in 1972. At that time I was just a little punk and didn't know much, so I came home and said, "Hey dad, this guy Maynard Ferguson's coming to town. Do you know anything about him?" He said, "Just a minute." He pulled out this 78 RPM record of Maynard with the Charlie Barnet Orchestra and I was floored. I had no idea the trumpet could do that.

MT: What was the first band you toured with?

DB: It was with the Akron University Jazz Ensemble — we went to the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland, and when I came back, I hightailed it out to Las Vegas. Out there I played with Si Zentner's Orchestra several times and we'd go into California, Arizona — the West Coast kind of thing. But I never actually toured with any of the other big bands. I was invited to go with Buddy Rich to Japan but I had to turn him down because I had other obligations in Vegas. We were going on a tour down to Brazil and I didn't want to cut that at the last second — that would not have worked out well.

MT: Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

DB: Well, let's see. After I came back from 20 years in Vegas, in addition to starting the Band, some interesting things have happened. Last May, Judy Collins came to Cain Park, and they asked me to conduct a 27-piece orchestra, which I was thrilled to do. I handpicked some of the finest Cleveland musicians and we did all of her big numbers from the Wildflowers album, so that was really special. I remember my sister wearing that record out when she was a kid, so that was a lot of fun.

Click [here](#) to learn more about the Dave Banks Big Band.

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