

Noteworthy history

Rich heritage of music, musicians in Columbus strikes a chord

By Aaron Beck THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Unlike Kansas City, Seattle or New Orleans, Columbus has never had a “signature sound.”

Now, though, the city has a signature book. With *Columbus, The Musical Crossroads*, David Meyers has compiled a tidy overview of players whose music spanned jazz, country and rock from 1900 to 1970.

The book, in stores Monday, is part of Arcadia Publishing’s “Images of America” series, a line that includes about 5,000 histories of life and times in U.S. cities.

Meyers — co-founder of the Columbus Senior Musicians Hall of Fame; a co-author of *Columbus Unforgettables*; and archivist of the ongoing project *Listen for the Jazz: Key Notes in Columbus History* — said his goal for the 128-page paperback was “to pack the maximum amount of information” and “to give a more rounded look at Columbus music.”

With chapters such as “The Great Band Builders,” “Dance Hall Days,” “Honkers, Squawkers, and Bar Walkers” and “Out of the Garage,” the book serves as a primer for anyone interested in the city’s historically rich musical culture.

Meyers provides lively introductions, then crams chapters with more than 200 previously unpublished black-and-white photos.

Assisting in the project were photographer James Loeffler, arts advocate Candice Watkins and trumpeter Arnett Howard; with Meyers, they found pictures in garages, behind filing cabinets and on the walls of relatives of those featured in the book.

Some of the musicians are internationally famous: Nancy Wilson, Rahsaan Roland Kirk and Harry “Sweets” Edison.

Others are veterans beloved locally: jazz singer Jeanette Williams-Brewer, rock-blues guitarist Dave Workman.

Meyers, who has written about central Ohio musicians and collected their photographs for more than 25 years, said Columbus — much more than many other major American cities — has always had a plethora of highly skilled musicians.

“There’s always been that transitory population, especially with Ohio State, where people bring different sounds with them from other parts of the country and create these bands that don’t last more than a couple of years because they’ve left town after they create them,” he said.

“Also, I think Columbus musicians are better educated than in many cities.

“I’ve talked to so many that went into music but they went on and got college degrees and became lawyers and doctors. Columbus has never really had the blue-collar aspect in the community that a lot of the rust-belt cities did.”

But what’s kept Columbus a melting pot of musical styles, Meyers said, is geography. More than half of the U.S. population lives within 550 miles of Columbus, and a couple of generations ago, that number was much higher.

“What’s always set Columbus apart, I think, is that crossroads aspect,” Meyers said.

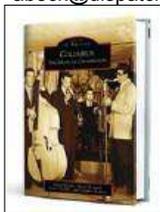
“All of the major big bands were always coming to the Valley Dale (Ballroom), and so many musicians were constantly being exposed to all of this stuff. We weren’t an isolated pocket out there that developed its own sound.”

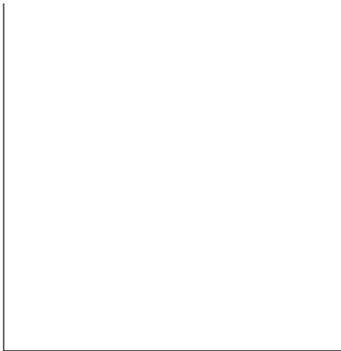
Meyers said he hopes to persuade Arcadia Publishing to commit to a follow-up history of Columbus music of the past 40 years.

“I can easily see doing a couple of more books,” he said. “I’ve already got 100 more good photos toward the next one.

“There are a lot of people that we haven’t even touched on at this point that need to be talked about.”

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Jazz guitarist Beau Dixon, circa 1926



COLUMBUS, THE MUSICAL CROSSROADS PHOTOS One of many bands formed by Frederick Neddermeyer, circa 1900



Tenor sax player Paul Cousar and his quartet, circa 1955