



DAN'S DEN
By Dan Morgenstern

I know it's not good form to talk about oneself, but think that turning 90 is a good

excuse. In any case, here goes: My dear friend, David Ostwald, master of the tuba and leader of the Louis Armstrong Eternity Band (which will soon celebrate its 20th birthday of Wednesdays at Birdland), made October 23, the day before my 90th birthday, a very special occasion (See our cover story on page 5. Dan had no knowledge of it when he wrote this column).

The band that night (David draws from the deep pool of first-class musicians) was Bria Skonberg (need I say trumpet and vocal?); Jim Fryer, trombone and vocal; Will Anderson, clarinet and alto sax; Jared Engel, resonator guitar (a very special collector's item; the great Eddie Durham played one with Bennie Moten); Arnt Arntzen, guesting on banjo and guitar; Alex Raderman, drums; Joe Boga, trumpet and Evan Arntzen, clarinet, sitting in for the finale—always "Swing That Music." As it did for the whole set.

The standout for me was Bria in both her role on "Lover Come Back to Me," at a tempo a bit faster than usual for this standard (Eddie Condon adjusted "Lover" to "Liver"). I was more than pleased to see our Editor's warm review of Bria's latest, *Nothing Never Happens*, on her own label. My first encounter with this special lady from British Columbia was in fact with the Ostwald Louis bunch, and she nearly bowled me over when ripping off Louis' famed opening cadenza to "West End Blues" as if it were easy to execute faultlessly, as she did. Been a fan ever since; she is a sterling example of an artist who is both contemporary and in touch with the legacy—and original in both aspects.

So many friends showed up for me (and the music) -- among them Lew Tabackin, who saluted me with a beautiful reading of "My Ideal," and Ed Polcer, who sat in for a number—both gentlemen had other things to do, and that they dropped in just for me was quite a birthday present.

Possibly the musical low point of the event was my vocal effort. It was not by any means the first time I had vocalized with the Eternity

Band—my debut goes back at least a decade—but this time it was a bit more ambitious. Of course it was a song associated with Louis, who put it on the jazz map: "When You're Smiling". But I decided (with fair advance warning to the leader of the band) that since I could not tackle the famous elevation Louis gave it instrumentally, I'd instead follow the vocal chorus with my scat version of Lester Young's great solo on the Billie Holiday-Teddy Wilson recording, the second of the two takes. I did not inform the audience but knew that a few sharp ears



Bria Skonberg. Photo by Dan Morgenstern

would catch on. Sure enough the one and only Phil Schaap called out "Take three!" which truly made my day!

Speaking of Louis, I find it hard to believe that next year will mark the 50th anniversary of his death. That will surely trigger quite a few tributes, but of course such have been part of the scene ever since Pops left us. A particularly fine one took place about a month later, also at Birdland but downstairs, at the relatively new space called the theater. It was presented by Daryl Sherman, joined by

her regular of many decades, bassist Boots Maleson, and a more recent frequent collaborator, the remarkable Scott Robinson. Scott commands (and owns) an astonishing range of instruments; on this occasion he brought two: the tenor he features on his most recent (and splendid) CD, and the tarogato, a Hungarian relative of the clarinet (with a tone reminiscent of the alto version of that horn). It was a gift, as Scott mentioned, from the late Joe Muranyi, and thus most appropriate for a Louis tribute, as Joe had been an Armstrong All Star. Daryl always makes her tributes special, and this was no exception, starting off with a rousing "Jubilee"; including a rarity, Louis' own "Red Cap" (with a lyric by Ben Hecht, not the famous one, but a little known songwriter, who did a nice job for Pops); the always good to hear "A Kiss To Build A Dream On"; and a sparkling "I Double Dare You," on which Daryl and Scott did a couple of near telepathic instrumental choruses, with Boots seeming to read their minds. Louis (and the song's composer, Terry Shand, whom I once met) surely relished that performance up on their clouds!

SWINGADELIC

Every Monday at
Swing 46 from
8:30-11:30

Saturday Jan 11
Madison Community House
Dance 8:30-11:30

Saturday February 22
Westfield Public Library
"Ella Fitzgerald" 3-4:30pm

Saturday February 29
Hoboken Elks Club
Hoboken Synagogue
Fundraiser 7-11pm

www.facebook.com/swingadelic