
ON THE STARTING LINE
FROM CHICAGO, SKOKIE, AND DES PLAINES, ILLINOIS ...
THE VANGUARD!

THE VOICE OF **THE VANGUARD**

www.DesPlainesVanguard.com

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Bill O'Connell's Chicago Skyliner Big Band

Please join us once again at Fitzgerald's on Sunday, **March 6th at 6PM**. If you are planning on going, we ask that you reply to this email so we have an idea of number. But if that is not possible, just show up at Fitzgerald's, 6615 Roosevelt Rd. in Berwyn, and we'll find a place for you! Come and visit with these folks who have already responded: **John DeVito, Jim Grosso, Toni O'Kelley Pope, Mike Deane, Cathy O'Connell Letourneau**, in addition to lots of spouses and friends. Last month, 32 people were part of the Vanguard contingency!

As always, be sure to listen to **Bill's** radio show, *New Vintage* every Sunday at 5 PM on WDCB (College of DuPage) Radio – 90.9 FM.

Kudos to Jim and Mary Grosso and Thursday's Child!

On February 19th, Molly Malone's Irish Pub in Forest Park was packed with fans enjoying the great music of *Thursday's Child*. **Jim** and company dazzled the crowd with their great American folk style. All four members of the band play string instruments and sing. The harmonies were wonderful, and were enjoyed by Vanguard members: **Mary Sosin Von Qualen, Sue Bodkin Wetendorf, Cathy**

O'Connell Letourneau, Bill O'Connell, and some spouses, friends, and family. Let us know when your next gig is, **Jim!**

Be sure to check out Jim's great story on the next page!

The April issue of *Voice of the Vanguard* will be dedicated to **Kathy Blayney Carlin** (member: '66-'68) who left this life last week. If you have anything you'd like to mention about Kathy, please respond to this email and we will try to include it in a tribute to her next month.

If you have a memory or story about your Vanguard days that you'd like to share in a future edition of *Voice of the Vanguard*, please reply to this email. **Happy St. Patrick's Day!** Have a great month.

Cathy O'



May God grant you many years to live,
For sure He must be knowing.
That earth has angels all too few,
And heaven is overflowing.



A DAY IN THE LIFE (of a Vanguard)
by Jim Grosso

I really enjoyed reading **Bill O'Connell's** reminiscences in *Voice of the Vanguard* about memorable moments in his drum corps career, so I decided it's only fair to pitch in and do my part by submitting a story. Rather than a memorable moment, I'd like to talk about how a particularly memorable DAY I spent as a Vanguard affected me.

I'm sure most people who are reading this story either participated in, or have heard about the 1965 VFW National Championship contest in Chicago that took place in the large exhibition hall at McCormick Place. It was memorable not only because it was the first (and maybe the only) National Championship to take place indoors, but many who were there feel it might have been the best drum corps competition ever held, since virtually every highly rated corps in the country was there, putting on one great performance after another! My purpose here, however, is to talk about the OTHER time in 1965 that the Vanguard performed at McCormick Place, at the Chicagoland Music Festival.

The Chicagoland Music Festival was held in the Arie Crown Theater, in another part of the McCormick Place building from the hall where Nationals took place. It featured a wide range of musical acts, everything from pop to classical, and somehow we were invited as well. I remember we had to show up for a mid-day rehearsal, and were on the stage along with the "house" orchestra for that night, who we had heard was made up largely of Chicago Symphony Orchestra members moonlighting for a few extra bucks. As I recall, they played a song to warm up, and while I don't remember the tune, I distinctly remember someone, I think either **Jay** or **Sammy**, commenting: "My God, can you believe those trumpet players?" We'd never heard anyone play like that in person before -- I believe our reaction could best be described as "awe struck"! Then our turn came to play.

In my opinion, the solo soprano part for "Chicago" was the most challenging chart we played in my eight years with the corps. It required you to play everything from trills to slides, sustained crescendos to extended 16th note runs, with a few 16th triplets thrown in for good measure. Back in those ancient times, our charts were all written in the key of "G", and at one point over a period of about 12 beats, you had to cover pretty much the entire functional range of a soprano bugle, everything from low "G" to high "D" above high "G". To put this into perspective, among classical vocalists Luciano Pavarotti is known as the "King of High C's", because the ability to hit and sustain a high "C" is the benchmark of an operatic tenor. (It's what separates the men from the boys, and the performers from the pretenders) High "D" served the same function for

soprano buglers. After hitting a big, fat high "D", you couldn't help but think to yourself: "That's right, I'm Baaaad"!

There is one thing that was always true about the Vanguard - I don't know if it arose from some hidden, inner strength, or just from the fact we didn't know any better, but we were never intimidated by anyone or anything. We played the heck out of "Chicago", leading to more than a few raised eyebrows on the part of the "professional" musicians. I saw the first chair trumpet player look our way and make a comment to no one in particular, something like "Hey kid, not bad". If the solo sopranos weren't "full of ourselves" before that point, we certainly were afterwards. A little later we had some time to kill between rehearsal and the show, so I think it was **Tom O'Neil** who climbed with me up to the top row of the balcony to "scope out" the room. Some of the crew were talking to each other down on the stage in a conversational tone, and we heard every word they said distinctly, as if they were only a few feet away. We were really impressed, and it struck us that this phenomenon must be what people meant when they said a concert hall had "perfect acoustics". Eventually it came time to go find our uniforms and instruments and get ready for the show.

Dress codes, among other things, would begin changing dramatically about a year later, but back in 1965 performers still wore really fancy outfits for their shows. Backstage, you could walk around in your Vanguard uniform and almost feel underdressed. I remember being completely dazzled by the New Christie Minstrels who were wearing "evening wear", along with full stage makeup. (If you don't remember the Minstrels, they were lampooned pretty accurately as "The New Main Street Singers" in the mock documentary "A Mighty Wind" a while back) All too soon it seemed, the show started, all the acts were great, and then it was over. The acoustics truly were something special - it seemed that no matter where you were in the theater, the sound was wonderful. Later that night, I stayed awake thinking over and over again about how the greatest trumpet player I'd ever heard had said I was "not bad". Hot Damn – Life was Sweet!!!

Postscript:

About a year after that I went back to the Arie Crown Theater with **Bob Muller, Art Hedji** and **Bob Moore** for a rock concert. The main act was the "Mamas and Papas", and the opening act was my cousin Doug's band, the "Foggy Notions". (They had obviously decided on the name of their band in reaction to the "British Invasion" of a couple' years earlier.) Once again, the acoustics were magnificent, Doug's band did a great show and the Mamas and Papas were awesome! I left the theater looking forward to returning for many more great concerts in the future. A short time later, on January 16, 1967, McCormick Place (including the Arie Crown Theater) burned to the ground. This being Chicago, rumors circulated about the cause of the fire, and an investigation was conducted, but nothing was

found. The building now known as "McCormick Place East" was constructed to replace the old building, at several times the cost of the original, and it was said that the acoustics in the new Arie Crown Theater would be just as good as the old one. I've been there and it's not true. For whatever reason, the magic is gone. I hate when that happens.....



McCormick Place after the January, 1967 fire

Now it's someone else's turn to take a pen (or a keyboard) and spend a few minutes to share one of your memories with the rest of us. Who's next -- we've had 2 stories from the drum line and one from the horns, how about the guard?

Editor's Note: Thanks, Jim, for the very entertaining history lesson. Keep 'em coming, Vanguard!