

Musician Matt Finley & the joy of jazz

By Kate Goldsmith

Matt Finley has worn many proverbial hats – from college dean and instructor to tech wiz, from multi-instrumental jazz musician to band-leader and composer. The part-time Pine Plains resident took a break last week to speak with this writer as he prepares for an October concert, titled “Intimate Brazilian Jazz,” set at The Smithfield Church in Amenia.

Some of our readers may recall the annual free concerts Matt and his long-time band, Rio JAZZ, performed for more than 30 years at Dutchess Community College, many of those in honor of Jazz Appreciation Month in April. While Rio JAZZ is no longer an active unit, a version of the band will perform at The Smithfield Church on Oct. 11.

These days, Matt is focused on composition, but he also plays with two big band jazz outfits, one in Kingston and one upstate in Glens Falls; and is active in youth music education in the region.

Matt is a retired professor of computer information systems and dean of academic affairs emeritus at Dutchess Community College, where he also directed the DCC Jazz Ensemble and Brass Choir as an adjunct professor of music. He’s perhaps best known for his expertise on several brass instruments, including trumpet and flugelhorn; but he also plays soprano sax, vibes and flute. His compositions have been performed by the Northern Dutchess Symphony Orchestra and The Smithfield Chamber Orchestra, among others.

It all started with a flutophone

Matt took up his first instrument, the flutophone, in third grade. Similar to a recorder, the flutophone was a common way to get grade-school children interested in music.

“It worked. I enjoyed the instrument,” Matt says. “They gave me a trumpet in fourth grade. I had an older brother who was a trumpet player. He wanted to play a sax, but they gave him a trumpet.”

Matt learned how to play tenor sax himself 40 years later, when he was

involved with the DCC Jazz Ensemble.

Brazilian jazz was an early and lasting love. Prior to that, Matt was influenced by the Cuban music records his father would bring home.

“He was in advertising for Philco Corporation; they made record players, among other things,” says Matt. “Even before I started playing, I had that sound in my head, so I’ve always been receptive to Latin music.”

When the Bossa Nova craze hit the world in 1962-1963, Matt was right there. Composers like Antonio Carlos Jobim and João Gilberto created a new style of music (Bossa Nova translates to “new beat”) fusing samba and jazz. Matt says Brazilian jazz is defined by “a combination of sophisticated Latin rhythms with



Matt Finley. Photo by Duane Beyer

very intricate chord changes. So it’s European melodies combined with African rhythms.”

Matt studied composition with Edgar Curtis, director of the Albany Symphony, for three years.

“I learned how to conduct, how to analyze scores,” he says. “The textbook was

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DCAS Volunteer of the Year Mollie Pulver loves ‘being at the Fair’

By Curtis Schmidt

For Mollie Pulver, it’s all about the thrill she gets when she renews great friendships every year at the Dutchess County Fair.

She’s had a long-time love affair with the Fair, but she doubts she will ever catch her dad, the late Jack Pulver.

This year’s winner of the Volunteer of the Year award from the Dutchess

County Agricultural Society (DCAS) has been exhibiting and volunteering at the Fair for about 60 years. Her dad, who passed in 2019, was a DCAS member for 66 years, with 40 as member of the Board

of Directors. Mollie has been a member of DCAS for 20 years.

“I was completely surprised. I just love being at the Fair and the people I work with,” she said. “There are so many great memories. This (volunteering) is like a tribute to my dad. He joined the Ag Society when he was 18.”

Working at the Fair is an annual vacation, said Mollie “and I’ve been taking a vacation at the Fair ever since I was a kid in high school – getting carpal tunnel scooping that hard ice cream in the milkshake booth.”

Andy Imperati, DCAS President and CEO said, “Mollie has been an integral part of Livestock Hill for a long time. She is one of our unsung heroes who has given countless hours over the years and it has not gone unnoticed. We appreciate all that she does.”

For many in the agricultural community, Mollie is the voice they hear every year at the youth and open dairy shows. But it’s much more than just announcing and making sure participants are in the show ring on time.

“It’s also entering results in the system, a lot of organizational elements and procuring about 55 trophies,” she noted. That added up to about 41 hours this year, plus another 15 hours at home packing trophies and driving two hours each way

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In the center, Andy Imperati, DCAS President and CEO, presents the Volunteer of the Year award to Mollie Pulver. Courtesy photo

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something called 'The Norton Scores,' it's a survey of all of Western music. I particularly loved the French composers, [but] I get musical ideas from all over."

In 2013, Matt was a guest soloist with the Northern Dutchess Symphony Orchestra, performing four of his compositions and orchestrations. His CD with Rio JAZZ, "Brazilian Wish," has garnered international recognition, and two of his Brazilian jazz compositions were finalists at the 2009 Los Angeles Music Awards. The CD is featured online including Spotify, Pandora, and Apple Music.

Love notes

Matt and his wife, singer-songwriter and record producer Denise Jordan Finley, have been married 51 years, and split their time between Pine Plains and Diamond Point, on the western shore of Lake George in upstate Warren County.

Unsurprisingly, music was the initial force that drew them together ... even before they set eyes on each other.

"We met while I was studying at Albany Law School," Matt says. "I was playing in the jazz clubs in Albany but had no place to practice, so I asked The College of Saint Rose if they would let me practice. Denise was a music major there and we first 'met' by hearing each other play in closed practice rooms. She thought none of the music majors could play like I did, and I loved hearing her original songwriting. Although it was love at first hearing, we soon met, and I proposed within a few months."

The couple has three children, two living in Los Angeles and one in Cleveland; and two granddaughters, ages 6 and 11.

"All are musically talented in some form, but like me decided on another career," Matt says. "The 11-year-old, Joey, recently started playing trumpet – I just gave her a better mouthpiece – and is already a phenomenal graphic artist like her father."

Denise and Matt share a musical connection to The Smithfield Church in Amenia, where Denise is the longtime choir director.

"Denise started 20 years ago, and I just kind of came along to help when I could. This is our 20th Christmas concert coming up; she started to bring in all these tremendous musicians to perform solos for this concert. I said we should all be playing together. That was the genesis of the church's orchestra," Matt says. "In 2021, I formed the Smithfield Chamber Orchestra and took over producing the annual Christmas concerts. We are both amazed and delighted with the level of support for music we have found at Smithfield."

The Bang Family Concert Series has allowed Matt to produce quality concerts at the historic church. The series, endowed by late musician Bill Bang on behalf of his daughter, Smithfield parishioner Susan Bang, "was created to encourage area residents to hear an eclectic line-up of top regional and international artists and discover a warm community of music lovers in the church's beautiful Greek Revival building," according to the church's website.

Admission to the concerts is by suggested donation. Although Matt offers his services at no charge, the proceeds help the church keep the series going.

This will be Matt's last season as director of the Smithfield Chamber Orchestra. One of the orchestra's flutists, Michelle Demko, will assume the leadership mantle at the end of this year. Demko is the retired head of the music department at the Allen-Stevenson School in NYC.

"She's been at my right hand for all the events for a very good reason: she's terrific," Matt says.

Reflecting on his work with The Smithfield Church concerts, he says "I have accomplished much more than I ever thought possible. ... My philosophy is to get things started and running well, and then step aside and let someone else take over while I begin another challenge."

The beat goes on

"I'm very busy writing primarily, and I go where my music can be played," Matt



Matt Finley records a vibraphone part in a studio at Woodstock for one of his arrangements as a backup musician on a CD by his wife, Denise Jordan Finley. Photo by Denise Jordan Finley

says. In addition to performing as a guest artist with two big bands, Matt also works with Bridge Arts and Education, "a non-profit dedicated to promoting education and collaboration as a means to grow a more diverse and innovative music community," according to its website.

"Dan Shaut has put together a community band for all ages. It's first-class, some of us who are pros and others who are students, and we try to help them [students] along. I think it's wonderful."

Another of the Bridge Arts bands, comprised of top area high school stu-

dents, recently played along with the community band at the Falcon in Marlboro, Ulster County, Matt adds.

October will be here before we know it, but Matt will be ready for the "Intimate Brazilian Jazz" quintet concert set Oct. 11 at The Smithfield Church. Right now, he's composing arrangements for the Smithfield Chamber Orchestra's 15 players at their Dec. 6 "Jazzy" Christmas concert.

"That takes a lot of time!" he says. Visit <https://thesmithfieldchurch.org/> for more information about the concerts.

County officials encourage respect & kindness as new school year starts

With a new school year beginning next week, Dutchess County Executive Sue Serino and Sheriff Kirk Imperati ask the community to please put kindness, respect and safety first, in schools and on the roads. The leaders encourage parents, teachers, classmates and drivers alike to do their part in creating safe spaces for children, whether inside classrooms or traveling to and from school.

Serino said, "Beginning a new school year is always filled with excitement and possibility. By leading with kindness, we can help create classrooms where every student feel respected, appreciated and prepared to learn. When we show care for one another, we give students the confidence to learn, grow, and reach their full potential."

Serino said respect is the foundation of a healthy learning environment. She stated when parents, teachers, staff and fellow students treat each other with compassion and dignity, schools become communities that foster growth, achievement and positive experiences for all.

Imperati encourages drivers to carry that same respect onto the roadways. With schools reopening, he reminded motorists that slowing down and using extra caution is critical, especially during drop-off and dismissal times.

"As children are walking, biking and boarding/unboarding buses to get to and from school, all drivers need to stay alert and follow the rules of the road," Imperati said. "Please slow down in school zones, listen to crossing guards

and never pass a school bus with its red lights flashing. Protecting students' safety is a responsibility we all share."

Drivers are asked to build extra time into their commutes so they can safely stop for buses. New York State law requires all vehicles to stop for school buses that have flashing red lights, including on divided highways such as Routes 9, 44 and 55 in Poughkeepsie. Those who ignore school bus stop signs and flashing red lights risk tickets and fines as buses throughout the County are now equipped with stop-arm cameras to catch violators through a partnership with BusPatrol LLC; 11 of the 13 school districts within Dutchess County are participating in the program.

Beyond road safety, the County Executive and Sheriff reaffirmed their dedication to maintaining safe and supportive environments in partnership with local school districts.

Imperati said, "Nothing is more important than the safety of our students. Our School Resource Officers, who are trained in prevention, de-escalation and intervention, are once again returning to local schools this year to provide guidance and protection."

Serino said, "Success in the classroom depends on strong partnership between families, educators and the community. Dutchess County is proud to support that collaboration and wishes every student a year filled with learning, growth and opportunity. May this school year give each of you the chance to shine!"

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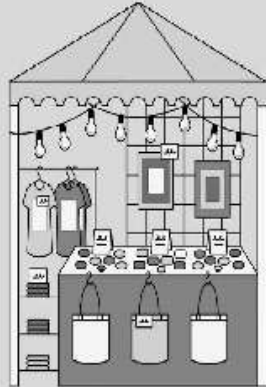
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