

# BLOWING THIER OWN HORNS

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## Music is in the blood or so some say.

This may be true for two musicians who both gave up playing the trumpet for 10 years before being drawn back to the music of their pasts.

Sal Ciraldo, aka Regent Scott, and Gene Bensen were always trumpet players and always will be, and now their mission is to bring the big band sounds of New York jazz back to the stage with the **Bensen-Scott Big Band**.

## Gene Bensen

Born and raised in Brooklyn (Coney Island to be precise) Gene Bensen, 60, began playing trumpet when he was 11 and played professionally at 15 when he was the band leader at Ruben's Maple View Hotel in Kerhonkson, N.Y.

After high school he joined the U.S. Army and was in the Army band stationed at the Brooklyn Army Terminal. While serving overseas in Germany, he was in another Army band that traveled in "The Rolling Along Show." After his tour of duty ended in 1965, Bensen returned home and played with the Jimmy Dorsey and Tommy Dorsey bands.

He was one of the original trumpet players in the national company of "Fiddler on the Roof" and was with the Ice Capades for three years. The sounds of his trumpet can also be heard on two BeeGee's albums, "Jive Talkin'" and "Main Course."

While he was in Pittsburgh he played with Johnny Mathis and in New York, Lionel Hampton, whose nickname is Gates. He also played with the Glen Miller band, Machito, Willie Rosario, Tito Rodriguez, Joe Quijano, Charlie Palmeri and Orlando Marin. He also played the trumpet in the show "Dancin'" for the run of the show on Broadway and did a tour with the Temptations.

### **Then in 1980, Bensen was in an accident.**

"I lost all my top teeth and damaged my bottom teeth," said Bensen, a three-year Somers resident. "Things were not the same after that." It is extremely difficult to play the trumpet without the use of teeth as the player must grip the mouthpiece, Bensen said. He put down his trumpet for 10 years. "Until I met Sal (Scott) I really hadn't played," he said.

## Regent Scott

Scott, 62, was born in Manhattan and began blowing tunes when he was 13. It wasn't long before talent and ambition landed him his first professional gig at 15. He played in local bands and after high school, hung out in the city. He played with Sal Salvadore, Les and Larry Elgart, and eventually had his own band, playing New York clubs.

As a child, Scott had the nickname, Regent. "I don't even know where it came from," Scott said, but when he was older he began using Regent Scott (a last name he and a colleague came up with out of the blue) professionally.

He played at the Concord Hotel in the Catskills with a nine-piece show band (called a lounge show band). Scott went on to Las Vegas and played at the Stardust and Hilton International. He also had a band at the Palisadium in Fort Lee, N.J., he said.

He has played with the Lynn Oliver Band in New York and did solo trumpet work with pianist Louis Kovacs in supper clubs in New York like The Hotel Pierre, Sherry Netherland and St Moritz. While he was on a roll, he opened up a music entertainment office in the early 1980s. The company booked corporate functions, weddings and parties for 18 different bands. Then in the mid-'80s live music took a dive and DJs became the hot commodity, according to Scott and Bensen. Scott, a 28-year resident of Chappaqua, put his trumpet down and didn't play for 10 years.

## Meeting of musical minds

However, as time went by both men began to yearn for the music of old New York-style big band jazz. In 2000, Bensen and Scott met when they answered an advertisement seeking trumpet players for an area big band. Although they had never met, their musical paths had probably crossed somewhere in the past. The men became instant friends and Bensen began playing the trumpet regularly. "I got to the dentist and he fixed my mouth up," Bensen said. "Then I had to fix my mind up." He credits Scott for helping him get his heart back into trumpet playing. "Most of the time I play much better than I ever played," Bensen said.

## Starting a band

"I wanted to come back with a big band," Scott said. "I didn't want to do '40s music. It's wonderful music, but I wanted to do more contemporary music." "We wanted something different," Bensen said. The band plays music in the style of Duke Ellington and Count Basie as opposed to that of the '40s swing scene. And from there the men began recruiting old friends, mostly professional musicians. "You can't buy the quality of players we get," Bensen said. "A lot of the musicians are professionals from New York," Scott said.

"We want to carry the torch for big band sound," Scott added, likening their passion for New York jazz to that of jazz's great trumpet player Wynton Marsalis. Both Bensen and Scott also privately teach trumpet.

Annette Wolf Bensen, Gene Bensen's wife, is the band's business agent. She is a graphics artist and prepress consultant and teaches at New York City College of Technology in Brooklyn, Baruch and The Association of Graphic Communications in New York. She also chairs the Curriculum Committee for the Advisory Council for Occupational Education of New York City Department of Education.

"I do their letters and contracts," she said. "The band is great. They're really nice guys." "Some of the people we have worked with for concerts have been wonderful to work with," Wolf Bensen said.

## Where they play

The band plays mostly at concerts, but they have done weddings, and would like to do more. While they are dedicated to playing New York big band jazz they also play popular big band music of the 1940s. "A lot of big bands play Glen Miller 'In the Mood' music," Scott said. "We're more contemporary, but we can play that, too." Bensen said that hiring a band for a wedding or party is "surprisingly affordable" or at least this band is. Both men stressed that they play for the love of music and not the profit. "We want to do this," Bensen said.

The band played 12 concerts last year. Their first performance was in New Roc City in New Rochelle in 2001. They have performed four concerts at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Somers and will perform there again May 4.

## Practice makes perfect

The band practices once a week in Mount Kisco and Bensen and Scott both said they are always looking for "competent players" to join in the music making. However, beside being a great musician, someone interested in joining the band has to be "a nice person," Bensen said.

## How big is big?

The big band usually plays concerts using more than 20 pieces. However, the band can decrease the number of pieces according to the needs of an event.

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## The music men

On a CD the band recorded in April 2002, the music varies from that of Billy Holiday to Billy Joel. Here's a list of the music:

€ "Orange Sherbet" < Spanky Davis, trumpet

€ "Rachel" < featuring Gene Bensen, trumpet

€ "Just the Way You Are" < featuring Bob Larro, vocal

€ "Vertigo" < Bill Ash, Jon Leonard, trumpet solos; Dave Will, John Philpott, tenor sax solos; Joe Stelluti, baritone sax solo; Ray Fitzgerald, trombone solo; Frankie Paul, guitar solo; and Robin Pitre, piano solo

€ "Fantasy for Saxophones"

€ "Ice Castles" < Featuring Regent Scott, trumpet

€ "Sweet Georgia Brown"

€ "I Remember Clifford" < featuring Spanky Davis, trumpet

€ "God Bless the Child" < Ray Fitzgerald, trombone solo

€ "The Heat's On" < John Philpott, tenor solo

€ "Switch in Time" < Gene Bensen, trumpet solo

€ "Feelings" < featuring Regent Scott, trumpet

Members of the band not listed above are: Dave Quenzler, trumpet; Julius Gorog, Elliot Semel, Wayne Johnson, Kevin Quigley and Art Triggs, trombone; Jeff Whalin, Al Brooks, John Donnelly, saxophone; Don Gerundo, piano; Branislav Brinarsky, bass; Jon Doty, drums; and Mareck Soltis, guitar.

## **A few members of the Bensen-Scott Big Band**

Rick Henly was the lead trumpet player for Broadway's "Miss Saigon" and has more than 20 years experience playing lead trumpet in Broadway shows. His newest CD will be available in the spring. He has performed the on-stage Harry James solo in "Fosse" and substituted as lead trumpet on "The Producers," "Cabaret," and "42nd Street" to name a few. He has also performed with Liza Minnelli and Frank Sinatra. Conductors with whom he has worked include Leonard Bernstein, Sir Georg Solti, Claudio Abbado, Andre Previn, Rafael Kubelik and Lukas Foss.

Spanky Davis is a well-known trumpet player who played with Roy Eldridge. He can be heard on recordings with Ruth Brown and as a featured soloist with the big bands of Buck Clayton and Walt Levinsky. He has performed with Frank Sinatra, Annie Ross, Benny Goodman, Buddy Tate, Al Cohn, Tito Puente, Panama Francis and Bob Haggart.

Two local music teachers, Jeff Whalin and John Donnelly, are saxophonists for the band.

Saxophonist Dave Will is an arranger / copyist. Some of his arrangements can be heard on The Tonight Show, The Dick Cavett Show, to name a few.

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## **Start playing**

Musicians seriously interested in performing with the Bensen-Scott Big Band can e-mail the band at [\*\*gene@bsbbny.com\*\*](mailto:gene@bsbbny.com)