

Arts & Entertainment

Westfield's Full Count Band Keeps Sounds of Big Band Alive, Current

By ERIC NIERSTEDT

Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

GARWOOD—On Thursday night, the Garwood Crossroads was filled with classic Big Band music from Westfield, as the Full Count Big Band took the stage. Based in Westfield, the six-year-old band has been dedicated to keeping the sounds of Big Band music alive and current.

"Big Band and jazz are really the classical music of America," said band president (and alternate bass player) Mitch Kolesaire. "We really want to keep this music alive, but that doesn't mean just playing the more nostalgic tunes. Otherwise, we'd just play nursing homes. We try to bring in more modern music into the Big Band sound."

To accomplish this, Full Count has an array of talented musicians, including many local residents who often bring professional skill to the fold.

"We've always been an open band, and it's amazing how we've found some of these people," Mr. Kolesaire said. "One of our members, Frank Grasso, led a Big Band in Europe for 20 years. And another, Bob San Filippo, worked on Broadway. Our vocalist, Aubrey Parasolle, studied jazz vocals at the University of Miami and has her own three-piece band."

The array of talent has led Full Count to much success, and the band has played at several charity events and fundraisers. Full Count has also played the Westfield Jazz Festival. Currently, Full Count is working to make the Crossroads a more frequent stop on its tour list, hence the evening's show.

The band opened with the classic, "I've got the Whole World On A String," with smooth vocals from Ms. Parasolle. Afterwards, they moved into the Nat King Cole classic, "Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps." Ms. Parasolle then moved down so the band could play a couple of



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COUNT ON IT... The Full Count Big Band, a division of the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts, is an 18-piece big-band consisting of sax, trombone, trumpet and rhythm section. Recently, the band visited the Crossroads in Garwood to bring the Big Band sound to newer audiences.

instrumentals, including "Blues for Bassie" and, in a more contemporary turn, a Big Band version of James Taylor's "Country Road." The latter featured brassy horns and a funky bassline, yet was always recognizable as the Taylor classic.

After another instrumental, Ms. Parasolle returned to the stage to add vocals to the jazz classic "It Had To Be You" and the stomping "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," which was made famous by Marilyn Monroe.

Full Count then took a quick break, only to return with instrumentals "This Time The Dreams On Me" and "When You're Smilin," which had the perfect mix of gentle, dreamlike horns and a driving beat punctuated by drum rolls.

The band shone again on "Skyluck,"

with an amazing alto-sax solo by Mr. San Filippo, and "High Maintenance," which was referred to as a "band favorite."

Not to be outdone, Ms. Parasolle returned with the longtime standard "Fever," which was ripe with dark bass lines and sexy vocals. Full Count then ended the show with a trio of vocal songs – another Nat King Cole classic, "L-O-V-E," the Latin-tinged "Dance With Me" and the contemporary "How Sweet It Is" (also performed by James Taylor).

Afterwards, the only thing preventing the requested encore was the fact there were other bands on the evening's agenda. More on Full Count can be found at fullcountbigband.com.

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