

The Buffalo News : Entertainment

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Preview: Tudini and Co. bring dance fever to Mary Seaton Room

Kleinhans event going strong in second season

BY JANA EISENBERG - Special to The News



Robert Kirkham/Buffalo News - "In this situation, it's not about the musicians taking solos, but ... making it fun for the dancers." Jim Tudini

For Jim Tudini, the stars truly aligned to create a series of dances featuring his contemporary big band.

First, according to Tudini, came the band. "I wanted to put together a repertoire encompassing everything from the '20s, through a big-band sound, and up to R&B and the '60s and '70s," he said. "However, our repertoire was not ready for a dance series; we needed to enhance it with tangos, cha chas, meringues and mambos." When the staff of Kleinhans contacted him last year, getting that songbook in shape was exactly what Tudini did. "Kleinhans wanted to promote use of the Mary Seaton Room," he said by phone from a

classroom at Canisius High School, where he is also a music teacher. "They proposed a monthly series. We first did it last year, and it was a success, so we are doing it again."

The dances take place on the third Wednesday of the month through June, with the next date in the current series on Wednesday. Part of the success is based on Tudini and company's newfound sensitivity to what a dance-focused crowd might prefer. Tudini said his crew has picked up lessons on the importance of repertoire, tempo, length and order. "For dancers, it's nice to go through the different genres, like a fox trot, a waltz or a meringue," he said. "We now vary it, and don't play too many fast or slow ones in a row." They've also become more attuned to song length, necessitating a certain humility.

"In this situation, it's not about the musicians taking solos, but about making it fun for the dancers," Tudini said. "If the song is too long, we've learned, instead of being fun, it can become a burden. And we don't want that."

Free and friendly hour-long dance lessons by Corky Ferro are taught before the band starts at 7:30.

Richard Snider, 70, has attended about five of the events so far. A widower who never danced much in his younger years, he's now a regular, with a lady friend and a fondness for swing.

"The band really mixes it up," Snider said. "They don't just play '50s and '60s, but also some old stuff, and dance tunes." "This is the first place I've ever been that everybody dances," he said. "There is a wide range of ages and abilities; some just like to dance, and some have got the steps all down. But they all come to dance. Plus it's a wonderful room; the acoustics are great, and you are not jammed into a small hall." Paula Chameli, 61, has also become a regular. "I went by myself and took Corky's lesson. Everyone was very friendly, and after a few lessons, I got asked to dance," she said. "The band is wonderful. And the crowd is all ages, from late 20s up to people in their 80s." "If you are not an experienced dancer, you can still participate," Chameli said. "The dancers there like to teach others what they know. This event is just a good, wholesome thing."

PREVIEW

WHO: Jim Tudini Band

WHEN: Wednesday, May 21 and June 18. Free dance lesson from 6: 30 to 7: 30 p. m.; dance to live music from 7: 30 to 10: 30 p. m.

WHERE: Mary Seaton Room, Kleinhans Music Hall, Symphony Circle

TICKETS: \$ 15; group rate (10 or more) is \$ 12

INFO: 885- 5000