

MUSICAL NEWS

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REMEMBERING LOCAL 669

On Sunday, February 8, 2004, the surviving members of Local 669, the San Francisco local for black musicians under segregation, were invited to a long-overdue celebration in their honor, held at the Local 6 rehearsal hall, to commemorate the merging of Locals 6 and 669 in 1960. (See historical background on page 8).

The party started at 4:00 p.m. Slowly, the members of Local 669 began to arrive. By 4:45, the place was packed - and loud! Excited exclamations were heard as people noticed friends they hadn't seen in years. In spite of the hardships they had endured under segregation, these musicians celebrated the occasion with abundant laughter, heartfelt emotion and pure joy. Wayne Wallace and his trio provided elegant music, the food was bountiful, the wine overflowing.

669 members in attendance included George Alexander, Eddie Alley, Vernon Alley, Henry Bess, Ralston Brown, Wilbur Brown, Federico Cervantes, Art Cummings, Frank Fisher, Tom Gaytors, Charles Hartzog, Terry Hilliard, Johnnie Ingram, Richard Lewis, Thomas McElroy, Harold Phillips, Allen Smith, Chuck Walker, Earl Watkins, and Bobbie Webb. Family members were also present, most notably Dorothy Alley, who celebrated a birthday that day.

Surprisingly, for such an important event in our history, there was very little information printed about the merger, either in the *San Francisco Chronicle* or in the *Musical News*. What *could* be found was collected and chronicled by the staff at Local 6 for presentation at the celebration. Documenting the affair itself were Steve Zeltzer and Kazmi Torii from the SF Labor Video Project, who have since created a 32 minute video available for viewing at Local 6, and Rochelle Metcalfe from the *Sun Reporter*, whose comprehensive review of the occasion appeared in its February 12 issue. Local 6 staffer John Hunt and Local 6 (and 669) member Bobbie Webb took numerous pictures, and, thanks to the efforts of staff member Alex Walsh, a generous sampling of these photos appear on pages 5-7 (key on page 8). In addition, Alex was able to obtain many informal recorded interviews of 669 members.

The band (Wayne Wallace on trombone, Chuck Bennett on bass, and George Spencer on piano) graciously opened up the stage for some impromptu jamming. Roy Henderson (saxophone) George Alexander (trumpet) and Federico Cervantes (piano) sat in with the band for a few tunes - and Chuck Walker, Johnnie Ingram and Ralston Brown brought the house down with their smooth crooning.

The event was attended and supervised by Local 6 officers, board members, and staff - with able and much-appreciated assistance from Ann Hunt and Patrick Simms. Special guests included jazz writer Phil Elwood, Solano Community College board president Willie McKnight, Susan Sherwood and Catherine Powell from the Labor Archives & Research Center, and the irrepresible Walter Johnson, secretary-treasurer of the SF Labor Council, who elicited much laughter when he ended his otherwise poignant remarks by saying, "...and this is the first time I've gotten free food from musicians!"

IN MEMORIAM

EDWARD P. HAMMOND

VIRGINIA OJEDA

ANTHONY PARRINELLA

MELVIN RAUB

C. WARREN SAWYER

BOB E. SCHEID



Wayne Wallace, Trombone, Chuck Bennett, Bass,
George Spencer, Piano



Bobbie Webb, Santie Huckaby



Frederico Cervantes, Maria Tschirgi



Eddie Alley



George Alexander, Allen Smith, Frank Fisher



Gretchen Elliott, Ralston Brown



Group Shot



Johnnie Ingram



Art Cummings, Charles Hartzog, Phil Elwood,
Earl Watkins, Tom McElroy



Terry Hilliard, Verna Hilliard



Harold Philips



Roy Henderson, George Alexander,
jamming with the band



Chuck Walker



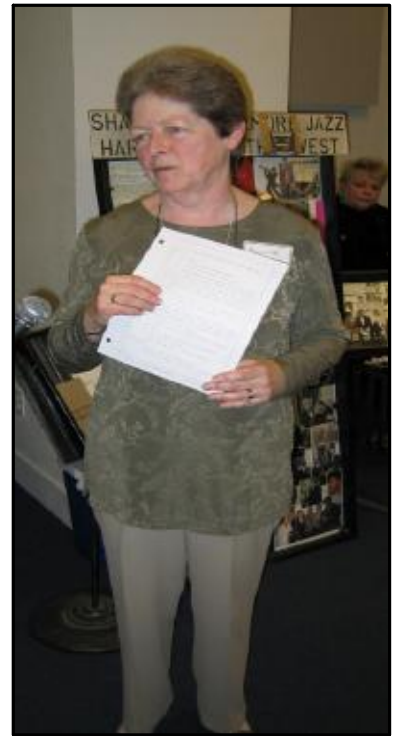
Vernon Alley, Phillip Alley, Rochelle Metcalfe, Walter Johnson



Henry Bess



Ralston Brown, Wilbur Brown



Melinda Wagner, President,
Musicians Union Local 6



Charles Hartzog



George Alexander



Philip Alley



Ralston Brown and band



Earl Watkins

LOOKING BACKWARD

A Brief History of Local 669 and Local 6

By Alex Walsh

Musicians Union Local 6 was established in 1885. Ten years later in 1896, The American Federation of Musicians was chartered and became part of the American Federation of Labor (which later became the AFL-CIO).

Black musicians were not allowed to join Local 6. In San Francisco, with rare exception, black musicians were not allowed to play east of Van Ness. In 1924, they were granted a charter by the AFM to do business as Local 648, which had the same jurisdictional boundaries as Local 6, and was headquartered in Oakland. Ten years later, during a bitter territorial conflict with Local 6 which ended up in court, the AFM revoked Local 648's charter. Black musicians were then placed under Local 6 stewardship. As a subsidiary of Local 6, they paid work dues and membership dues, but they had no rights. They could not vote on wage scales or job condition matters, or receive the death benefit.

In 1943, AFM President James C. Petrillo abolished all black subsidiary locals. He demanded that white locals accept black musicians as equal members, or he would grant them their own charters. When Local 6 refused, Local 669 was formed. Over the next 15 years, several failed attempts were made to merge the two locals. On April 1, 1960, because of the California Fair Employment Practice Act, the two locals were finally merged.

The segregation of our Bay Area black musicians was an enormously significant event and, with each passing year, the risk of the knowledge of it fading from our collective memory increases. We believe that we have an obligation to leave something tangible for future generations in order to help them understand what happened in the not-so-distant past. With this in mind, we are collecting as much information as possible to display during our celebration, and to keep in our Local 6 archives.

Among the various dignitaries invited to our celebration was Otis Ducker, member of AFM Local 161-710 Washington, D.C., Chairman of the AFM Diversity Committee, and a key participant in the planning of the merger of Locals 161 and 710 in the early 1960s in Washington, D.C. Although he was unable to attend, he sent the following letter which was read to those in attendance by President Wagner.

Dear Ms. Wagner:

Thank you very much for the invitation to attend the celebration commemorating the merger of Locals 6 and 669 and being held on February 8, 2004.

I am sorry that I cannot be with you and your members to celebrate such a notable occasion but after (the recent AFM meeting in) Las Vegas, I just cannot get back near the West Coast at this time.

However, I feel compelled to write and complement you, your board, and members for commemorating an event that I believe has served the best interest of Professional Musicians throughout the AFM and this country. The events that led to locals being identified by color are almost too distasteful to recall. However, I hope that as we look back, we will resolve individually and collectively, that we will never allow this type of situation to exist again.

Allow me on behalf of the AFM Diversity Committee to congratulate you and your local for your sensitivity and thoughtfulness on this occasion. You can be sure that we wish you the very best as you commemorate the occasion and look toward a future with success in all of your endeavors. I pray that you continue to celebrate the importance of diversity in your organization, and may it be an enabling factor as you strive to effectively represent the Professional Musicians in your area.

Fraternally yours,

*Otis Ducker, Member Local 161-710
Chair, AFM Diversity Committee*