

Albion family shares musical legacy through jazz

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Original jazz CD preserves Albion family's musical legacy

Project takes four years but builds on centuries of tradition

By Chuck Lentz
For The Independent

ALBION — Paul Hosford of Albion didn't know what he was getting into when he began developing a new jazz CD about four years ago.

He only knew he wanted to get a good recording of the piano artistry of his elderly father, Frank Hosford.

The instrumental jazz album, now titled "Generations," is "the culmination of my efforts to preserve as much of my father Frank's musical legacy as I could during the final years of his life," Paul Hosford said.

The recording of "Generations" took four years because Frank's piano playing for the album had to be recorded separately in the nursing home where he lived — after which the other instruments in each track were mixed with Frank's part.

One day when recording was beginning, Paul's son Thomas approached his father saying, "Dad, can we talk?" Though only 13 at the time, Thomas asked his surprised father if he could play the vibraphone — a xylophone-like instrument used frequently in jazz — on the album. After an extensive search that ended when an affordable vibraphone was located in Champaign, Ill., Paul Hosford was able to grant his son's request.

So the album was given the name "Generations" because it features three generations of the Hosford family: Frank, on piano; his son, Paul, on various instruments; and Paul's younger son, Thomas, 17, on vibraphone and other percussion instruments.

All 14 of the tracks on the album are original compositions. All were written by Frank or Paul.

Frank Hosford died unexpectedly in December 2013 but was able to hear "rough mixes" of all the original tunes that make up "Generations."

Also featured on some of the CD's tracks is Rich Hughes, a retired Grand Island music teacher and longtime friend of the Hosford family. Hughes is heard playing solo trumpet.

"Rich is a wonderful musician," Paul Hosford said.

With track titles such as "Sailin'" and "Persimmon," the CD could be characterized as mellow, evocative music. It's part of a tradition going back to the 1800s.

"Russ, my grandfather, growing up around music, said every Sunday afternoon they would get together as a family and have music," Paul Hosford said.

Actually, the family musical tradition began even before that.

Russ' grandparents, William and Alice Hosford, arrived in Boone County carrying a wooden flute in a covered wagon in the early 1870s. They "settled in a sod



Courtesy photo
Paul Hosford of Albion (right) and his father, Frank Hosford, work together to record jazz compositions. The Hosfords have been recording original compositions for the past four years, putting together an album called "Generations" featuring three generations of the Hosford family. Frank Hosford died in December 2013, before the CD was complete, but was able to hear rough mixes of the recordings before he died.



Courtesy photos
ABOVE: From left to right: Paul, Frank and Thomas Hosford.
RIGHT: Paul Hosford adds the percussion track to a recording.



house and taught music lessons, held musicales, and did a lot of music just the first year they were here," Paul Hosford said in Albion recently.

"Then their son Oliver Hosford could play the violin and also the snare drums, so whenever the circus came to the community, he would go and sit in with the circus band," Paul Hosford added. "He loved to play the Turkish tunes with the band."

Russ, Oliver's son and Paul's grandfather, "in high school played a banjo — not the type of banjo we associate with bluegrass, but it was a four-string banjo tuned like a ukulele or a guitar," Paul Hosford said.

Russ was part of a "little group called the Fidgety Five in the early 1920s, and they would have been one of the very first jazz bands to form in this area," Paul said.

Though Russ Hosford played banjo in that group, "his greatest love was singing, although he was a very talented man and he could also 'rattle the bones,' a skill that I've never been able to master," Paul added.

He demonstrated that "rattle bones" are a pair of curved, rib-bone-like pieces made of ebony, held in one hand and tapped together to emphasize a rhythm.

Frank Hosford, Russ' son and Paul's father, played both the piano and guitar. He was influenced by, and played, a number of different jazz styles.

In 1945, the height of the

swing era, Frank was in the U.S. Navy and was put in a group to play in officers' clubs, Paul said. "Music was 'part of life' in the service back then," he added.

Then "Frank came home, where he continued to play for friends and family but rarely for the public," Paul said. Frank spent his working years as a Boone County farmer.

"Music remained an important part of Frank's life, though, and when I came along, he wasted no time in introducing me to it."

Paul Hosford now plays string bass, guitar, flute, drums and hammer dulcimer. He plays primarily in the jazz idiom.

"I've really focused on jazz for some time because I wanted to connect with him as best I could while he was still living," Paul said of his father.

His interest is not simply in performing, however, but in music production as well.

He and his wife, Lori, operate Painted Heart Music, a company that produces and sells music CDs that feature not only jazz but a variety of styles from classical to rock. The company's website, paintedheartmusic.com, lists the albums currently available. CDs may be ordered from the website also.

Another performer on the album in addition to Hughes and the Hosford family (including Thomas' sister, Angela, on flute on one track) is Whitney Paulson, the

Boone Central High School band director, on violin. The Hosfords' older son, William, prepared the photos, layout and logo for the album.

Other performers on other Painted Heart CDs hail from the Albion area.

Since 2005, Paul and Lori Hosford have been co-directors of the Albion Area Arts Council, the organization that presents concerts and plays and also arranges arts and humanities residencies in area schools.

Thomas Hosford is a ju-

nior at Boone Central, and he counts music as one of his many extracurricular interests there. He recently played the lead role of Nathan Detroit in the school's production of "Guys and Dolls."

Thomas began taking piano lessons before he started school, and the later addition of vibraphone to his performing instruments was a natural one.

"Right now, I play bass guitar for the school band because we don't have any tu-

bas but we need low sound and I love the bass guitar," Thomas said. He also performs on a variety of percussion instruments.

A track from "Generations," "Alligator Wine," was featured in late March as "download of the day" on a major jazz website, All About Jazz. It's been downloaded about 1,300 times, Paul said. KZUM radio in Lincoln requested a copy of "Generations" and has added it to its library.