ABSOLUTELY FLOORED

A native New Yorker, Bob Spielmann spent a life in sales before he moved to Mobile to become WKRG’s national sales director. He wasted little time helping the arts.

“I moved here in 1982 and got involved with Mobile Jazz Festival in 1984 or ’85. J.C. McAleer was in charge then. When he left about five years later, then I became president,” Spielmann said.

He remained at the helm of the organization for the next two decades. The last big event staged by the group was a multi-day show in Cooper Riverside Park in conjunction with Mobile’s Tricentennial Celebration.

“We also had the National Intercollegiate Jazz Festival, too, which ran in conjunction with the Mobile Jazz Festival, when we used to have all these different colleges in,” Spielmann said.

Long retired from WKRG, Spielmann was quick to throw in his efforts when the Mystic Order of the Jazz Obsessed arose in 2001. He’s been on MOJO’s board of directors since it began.

On the cusp of his 91st birthday, Spielmann is remarkably active, mobile and vital. Most Mobilians have encountered him with little realization.

“I’ve been ushering at the Saenger, say, 16 years. Actually I started because I wanted to get involved with the symphony and then I got involved in all the other events that were happening there,” Spielmann said.

He went on to usher for Mobile Opera when they still utilized the Mobile Civic Center.

“With [Retired Senior Volunteer Program] RSVP we do all that stuff with the Joe Jefferson Players and the Mobile Theatre Guild. We do ushering or whatever they want us to do because they need all the volunteer help they can get. I’ve even run the elevator at JJP,” Spielmann laughed.

It’s apparent why he earned a nomination for the Artys’ new Art Soldier category, an honor intended for essential but low-key personnel normally behind the scenes and nearly anonymous to the general public. He was shocked at the nomination.

“All of a sudden I got this big envelope in the mail all about the Artys and I saw my name on it and I was absolutely floored. I said, ‘This can’t be right, there’s a mistake in it somewhere. I don’t even know what an Art Soldier is,’” Spielmann recalled.

His wife Margaret was just as excited.

“Oh, she’s calling up everybody and telling the kids and whatever, telling them, ‘Your father’s going to be a celebrity.’ I said to my son Scott, ‘If I should win this thing, I’m going to have to come over to your house and show you my Arty.’ And he said, ‘Oh Dad, you get so dirty,’” Spielmann laughed.

Kevin Lee . Arts Editor . Lagniappe Weekly . 25 January 2017
Bob, without a doubt, is Mobile’s #1 Jazz fan.
I cannot remember ever going to a concert and not seeing Bob there with his terminal smile.

We’ve known each other for many years. We worked for many years on the Mobile Jazz Festival. The Festival’s primary goal was the education of young aspiring musicians.

We went through some good times and some bumpy times. At first, there were questions about participants, audiences and leadership.

I am pleased to say that the Festival was one of the very first events held in Mobile that embraced and answered the above questions.

Bob was (and probably still is) always willing to do whatever he could to promote America’s music.

~J. C. McAleer, Founder | Past President

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blog.al.com/living-press-register/2011/02/love_at_the_saenger.html