

MUSIC



Ken Brashear

Jim Fleri

Doug Brantz

Steve Roark

The Lucky Strikes

Yozette “Yogi” Collins

While the scientific jury is still out on whether there is a gene that passes down musical ability from generation to generation, Jim Fleri of *The Lucky Strikes* jazz ensemble seems proof enough of the possibility.

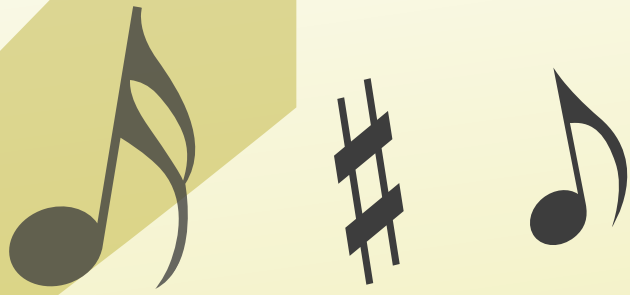
The son of professional pianist/entertainer Gene Fleri who performed with big names in Miami during its “Golden Heyday” and subsequently locally at Hound Ears for over 30 years, Jim was exposed to music from birth. And though his dad didn’t push him to play the piano, Jim soaked in the music around him. Actually, not being pushed into the family business is probably what drew him to it more than anything. “I almost think the worst thing a person can do is to say, ‘You sit here and do this’, Jim says referring to learning to play an instrument. “The most important thing about it, for me, is that I was exposed to it. It was music appreciation in general.”

Still, appreciating music and playing it are two different things, but Jim was naturally talented enough to ask his high school band leader which instrument the leader needed Jim to learn so he could join the band. Later he took up playing drums so he could play along with his dad and high school

friends. “When I first took up the drums,” Jim says, “I started playing jazz standards with dad as well as pop, rock and jazz with my friends. I essentially taught myself, picking up tips from watching professional drummers [who] played with my father. I guess you could say that I became a drummer so that I could be a part of the music that my father and friends were making.”

It was a good move. Jim and his friends continued making music into college; he even played in the band *Azz Iz* with Steve Roark who now plays saxophone with *The Lucky Strikes*. Steve, who joined The Lucky Strikes in 2007, really enjoys being a part of the band. “I feel fortunate to play with such capable musicians and truly humble guys,” he says.

It’s interesting that Steve refers to humility when speaking of *The Lucky Strikes*. Humility was pivotal to Gene Fleri who taught his son that “musicianship” -- being professional, on-time and not allowing your ego to become more of the focus than the music – is much more than simply playing an instrument. It’s a bit of a novelty in our ‘diva’ obsessed society.



Though Gene Fleri clearly influenced *The Lucky Strikes*, the band didn't form until after his death in 2005 when Jim felt drawn to try his hand at piano again. "Dad had passed away and [he and I] always talked about getting more serious with piano lessons, but unfortunately just ran out of time," Jim says. So, he and friend Doug Brantz started casually playing music together.

Doug, Computer Consultant at The Hayes School of Music at ASU, primarily played classic rock guitar until 2005 when he began taking jazz guitar lessons from an instructor at The Hayes School. Once Jim and Doug's casual jam sessions began – Jim on piano and keyboard bass, Doug on jazz guitar – and they found their sound, *The Lucky Strikes* classic jazz ensemble was born. Doug's talent, says Jim, is vital to the band. "Doug's unobtrusive style of rhythm guitar is integral to the sound of the band. Without that foundation, I would not be able to play keyboard bass where traditionally, I would be comping [a.k.a. "accompanying"] with my left hand on piano."

Adding Ken Brashear on drums and Roark on saxophone in the last few years, it seems *The Lucky Strikes* has struck a perfect balance. Wanting to perform more live shows -- catch them at Pepper's Bar on October 16th from 8pm-11pm – the band aims to entertain with classic songs that have become a part of the American landscape. "Our goal," says Jim "is to be true to these timeless songs in our presentation, but also bring fresh ideas with our interpretation. Whether our music sparks a memory for those old enough to have a personal connection to a song or a younger listener being exposed to it for the first time, we hope that everyone will enjoy listening to these classics as much as we love performing them."

As for Jim, though his successful "first" career was in graphic arts, performing jazz in *TLS* is equal to following in his dad's footsteps. Perhaps it's another nod to genetics? "I've always had a clear idea as to what I would want a band to sound like if I were to put one together and help shape it, and I'm more able to do that with the control that I have with essentially filling the role of two musicians -- playing piano and bass. I'm sure there is not only a genetic pull, but a spiritual one as well. As I continue to learn the craft, I understand more of the parts of me that are like my father."

For more information on *The Lucky Strikes*, log onto www.luckystrikesjazz.com. For booking information, call Jim Fleri at (828) 719-6437.