

WCLS in Whatcom County presents Library Stories!
Episode 36: Whatcom Grooves
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Christine

This podcast is produced on the ancestral homeland of the Nooksack and Lummi people. They have been its stewards since time immemorial, respecting the land, river and ocean with the understanding that everything is connected, related and alive. We acknowledge the elders and their collective and individual plights and achievements. We consider the legacies of violence, displacement, migration and settlement that bring us together today. And we pursue ongoing action to build lasting relationships and grow together so that all may prosper.

(Interlude music plays)

Neil

WCLS in Whatcom County Presents Library Stories, a podcast to open your eyes to all the ways your local public libraries matter. Join us as we reveal the power of sharing at the library. I'm your host, Neil McKay, Online Experience Coordinator for the Whatcom County Library System and today...

Neil

OK, here I am once again with Mary Vermilion. My boss.

Mary

Hi Neil. Happy summer.

Neil

Happy summer to you. Summer is going well right now.

Mary

It's doing all the summer things.

Neil

It's not always sunny, but it's pretty nice, and it's not too hot.

Mary

Yeah, it's perfect weather right now, for sure. And this is Summer Reading Kickoff week, so all the better to have sunny and 70 for our temperatures when we're inviting all of our community to our libraries to kick off their Summer Reading.

Neil

And how is Summer Reading going these days?

Mary

Well, I know just from my conversations, and I was at Deming Library yesterday for the Summer Reading Kickoff and to say hi to our friends at WECU who showed up there. Thanks again to WECU for being one of our Summer Reading sponsors. Thanks to their generous contribution we're able to purchase books to give away to young readers during this Summer Reading Kickoff, which is really great. So, they were there yesterday with giant Jenga and cornhole and lots of swag, and they'll be at Blaine Library later this week too.

Neil

Woah, giant Jenga?!

Mary

And as a reminder Summer Reading is for all ages. So, there were adults coming in and signing up for Summer Reading and young kids coming in and picking out their free books. So, it's really fun.

Neil

So, we're having kick-off parties at all of the branches and the bookmobile.

Mary

Yeah, absolutely. Mm-hmm. Yeah, I'm going out to Lummi Island today to go to Island Library.

Neil

That's great.

Mary

I haven't been in a while and I thought that would be fun to go out and especially on a day like today and go over and take some pictures and say hi to the Island library patrons and staff, I'm looking forward to it.

Neil

And so, you said there is that there were adults showing up too. So, adults are participating in the Summer Reading program.

Mary

Ohh yeah. Absolutely, Summer Reading is for all ages, and this year's program is particularly well suited for that because it's really simple. First of all, registration is really simple. We're just asking for your name and your age group just so you have an action to take, but the card is really simple. It's just two sided and on the back there's just activities that are well suited regardless of your age -- read a book, listen to an audio book, attend the library program, hug a tree, you walk in a forest, things like that that are easy to do, fun to do, and keep you connected with summer and Summer Reading in a really fun and easy way. And that's what summertime is all about.

Neil

Right. Of course, the tree theme is connected to our partner Whatcom Million Trees Project.

Mary

Yes, absolutely. And with all of the activities that you do, you're helping us to reach our goal to plant 200 trees in Whatcom County. And I know that we're doing really well thanks to everybody out there who is joining us for Summer Reading. So, if you love trees and you love books and you love libraries this is just such a perfect Summer Reading program, so we hope that everybody will come and join and help us plant trees.

Neil

Yeah, and all you have to do is do an activity and then tell the folks at your library you've done this activity and then they will count that as a leaf to go on the tree that is in the library so you can see the visual representation of our participation. And then for every 25 leaves that are gathered through participation that counts as one more tree that gets planted.

Mary

Correct. Yeah. And you can see the forest grow, Neil's doing a really cool thing on the website. So, if you go to wcls.org/summerreading, you can see the forest grow every week and see how we're doing toward our goal and maybe look for Sasquatch among those trees too.

Neil

That's the secret. Don't tell anyone.

Mary

I mentioned WECU and I want to make sure that we also say thank you to The Whatcom County Library Foundation. So we've mentioned WECU, we've mentioned Whatcom Million Trees Project and our third partner with Summer Reading is the Whatcom County Library Foundation who again through their generous contribution help us purchase books for young readers. So, thanks to everybody, it's just a big community effort.

Neil

That's right. That's right.

Mary

So, it's Summer Reading, but what's another perfect thing to do in the summer?

(Mary and Neil laughing)

Mary

Neil's more of a winter guy.

Neil

I'm like, I don't know. No, I'm just thinking that the things that I was thinking --.

Mary

Come together for live music.

Neil

Yes, live music is perfect.

Mary

Let me lead you there.

Neil

I was going a different direction, but laze around the house and sleep till noon.

Mary

Ohh and read books.

Neil

And read books.

Mary

You've asked me here today to talk about...

Neil

I really did. I invited you here because we wanted to introduce this episode which we're going to talk about jazz music.

Mary

Yeah, we're going to talk about a really incredible, (starts laughing), we're going to talk about jazz.

Neil

I forgot and got so wrapped up in the tree aspect of the Summer Reading, I forgot the aspect we really needed to talk about.

Mary

Like "Mary, that was a hard turn to the left there." So, I am really proud to introduce or happy to introduce on behalf of the Friends of the South Whatcom, Blaine and Ferndale libraries, a program that volunteers are creating this summer called Whatcom Grooves. And it's a concert series, a free concert series featuring some incredibly talented jazz musicians here in Whatcom County.

And the concept behind this event -- and you talked to the Friends at South Whatcom Library, and they're going to spell it all out so I'm not going to go on and on, but I will just say that this event is all about celebrating summer, celebrating jazz and live music and libraries. And it's all made possible by these three friends groups.

And this concert series was really inspired by a musical legacy that began in 2010 when the Sudden Valley resident and jazz aficionado K.C. Sulkin created the popular Sudden Valley Jazz Festival and I know

the friends are gonna talk all about that so stay tuned and make sure you learn more about this free jazz concert series happening at three locations in July and August.

And as well library staff are hosting Junior Groove to compliment Whatcom Grooves and that's going to be a great family program where young people will be able to play a little music, learn a little bit more about music and get their groove on at local libraries and the library staff will have all kinds of wonderful books and other library resources where they can learn more about music.

Before we get into the show, I just want to say thanks. Things like this, these wonderful community programs that are bringing people together to celebrate jazz and community and libraries. It's made possible by our Friends of the Library, and I've mentioned the three groups already, but I'll say it again South Whatcom, which is in Sudden Valley serving Sudden Valley, Glenhaven and Geneva. Blaine Library and Ferndale Library and we've also received terrific support from some sponsors.

So, The Whatcom Grooves Summer Jazz series is generously supported by grants from the Whatcom Community Foundations Project Neighborly and the Whatcom County Library Foundation, and we've received additional financial and in-kind contributions from Community partners: Costco, Summer Cronk with the Best Bellingham Homes Team, Kathy Stauffer with Team Stauffer Windermere Real Estate and the Bellingham Jazz Center is also providing free concert tickets to some of their events that will be available at the concerts that are happening in July and August.

And then finally, I just want to say, of course these are free, but financial donations to support local libraries will be gratefully accepted at the concerts as well.

WCLS staff have been behind the scenes kind of helping this really well-honed machine of volunteers from these friends. So, thanks to Cynthia French for designing the posters and to Tom Barthelme for supporting the children's programs and Jenn Rick with the Whatcom County Library Foundation, who is assisting with all the financial organization. And it's been my pleasure to also partner with these friends.

And I guess this is also an invitation to anyone listening that if you want to get involved with libraries, please consider volunteering with your local Friends group. Each branch has a Friends group and you might end up doing something fun like hosting a jazz concert.

Neil

That's right. So up next, we're going to hear from three of the Friends of the South Whatcom Library and the South Whatcom Branch Manager Liz Andre. In a little round table conversation we hear about the kind of jazz you're gonna listen to and how this came about and all sorts of fun things.

Mary

Are you going to sprinkle in some of Jerry Steinhilber's music as well?

Neil

Yeah, I'm going to. We'll hear some background jazz.

Mary

So Jerry, big shout out to Jerry. This doesn't happen without Jerry Steinhilber, who's a highly regarded percussionist and he performs here locally with many bands and he's the person who'll be performing at

two of the concerts and he also made the connections for us and arranged each of the three bands who will be performing. So, thank you, Jerry.

Neil

And he gives drum lessons, too.

Mary

And he gives drum lessons. And he's involved with the Bellingham Jazz Center. So, you gotta come out to these concerts to meet these people.

Neil

Usually a busy guy, yeah.

Mary

These amazing musicians who live here with us and to meet library staff and learn more about your libraries.

Neil

This is really a rare type of an event, a free Jazz Festival in Whatcom County and it's just gonna be amazing. There's different styles, there's different venues. We're playing in some larger and some smaller areas. And the Junior Grooves -- my understanding is all the kids who come to participate are gonna go home with something.

Mary

Yeah, they are going to get a free tambourine so, sorry about that caregivers and parents. At least it wasn't a drum.

Neil

Yeah, well.

Mary

I mean I don't know if tambourines better. But yeah, it's really great and there's something about jazz, this concert series, kind of. It reflects The Whatcom County Library system in many ways because like you said, it's at different venues just like us, spread out all over and each of our libraries are a little different, just like jazz. It's always changing. You're always learning something. It's joyful, it's reflective. It's all the great things that you love about your library and we're just really excited to host this what hopefully is the first annual, hopefully it will be an annual event.

Neil

Yeah, that will be great. Alright, well let's take a listen to the great interview that we did outside of the South Whatcom Library.

Mary

Sounds great.

(Interlude music playing)

Liz

I'm Liz Andre, and I'm the branch manager of the South Whatcom Library. With me today is Brett Green, one of our board members for the Friends of the South Whatcom Library, Deb Wibe, our president, Nancy Wyen, our vice president and as always, Neil. So, we're here today to talk about Whatcom Grooves. These are three free jazz concerts hosted by the Friends of the South Whatcom, Ferndale and Blaine libraries. These are going to run through the summer. We've got our first concert at the Glenhaven clubhouse on July 15th, the 2nd on August 5th at the Ferndale Library. And the third, August 19th at the Blaine Performing Arts Center. But, let's back up a little bit and talk about how we got rolling with this amazing partnership between the friends of these libraries and the library system.

So, Nancy, would you give us some history on how this all started and who got us going with jazz in Sudden Valley?

Nancy

Absolutely Liz, I'd be pleased to. About a little over 10 years ago we had a jazz organizer. His name was K.C. Sulkin. K.C. and his son organized a summer jazz series in Sudden Valley. We had concerts, four concerts a summer for 10 years. They brought in top-of-the-line jazz musicians and the original intent on this was to raise library money for the new South Whatcom Library that was being built, but also, as always, it was also to raise awareness at the library, bring people together. It was a fantastic success until COVID hit.

Liz

So, Brett, one of our board members here lived in Sudden Valley when these amazing jazz concerts were going on. Can you tell us a little bit about what brought you to the concerts and then to the Friends of the South Whatcom Library?

Brett

Sure. Well, they're kind of separate because I joined the board because I've always been a library person and move to Sudden Valley in 2018 and wanted to connect more with the community and so the library just seemed like something I was passionate about that I wanted to help share and have more people use and have in their lives.

My first career is actually in the record industry, and I played in saxophone and jazz bands when I was young. So, when I moved here and then they had the jazz concerts, that seemed pretty amazing. And K.C. had international talent, as Nancy mentioned. I think the last summer that there was jazz, one of the artists was from Brazil and really high-quality people and one of the artists of that summer also was Dave Brubeck's son with other high level jazz musicians, for \$20, which was crazy. So, it was a really amazing gem in the community and for the library here.

I've done a lot of community organizing in my life, originally in the record industry. And also, in the tech industry. And I've put on and been a part of hundreds of events. And so, to me it was a great opportunity to connect the whole community and to spread what was a great seed here to help other

libraries as well as connect with other great community organizations and kind of cross pollinate so library people could learn about the Bellingham Jazz Center and the Bellingham Jazz Center people who aren't involved in the library might get back into the library and if we happen to do things with schools, then that connects with the kids.

Music brings everybody together, just like libraries too. So, it just seemed like a really great opportunity. And when I kind of shared an idea of doing that with WCLS, it was embraced and luckily all the libraries have Friends organizations and there's people in all the Friends organizations that have given their time and their energy and their passions to helping make it happen. And we're hoping it will be fun and successful, and this will be the first of many and make it annual.

Liz

Well, that is so true that friends of the library are passionate people. So, I'm hoping that Deb, our president, can tell us a little bit about what the friends are.

Deb

I would be happy to. I think Brett has certainly alluded to some of the things that the friends focus on. As far as the Friends of South Whatcom Library, we are a nonprofit volunteer organization serving the South Whatcom Library and its communities of Geneva, Glenhaven and Sudden Valley. Our goals are actually twofold: to raise awareness, as Brent mentioned, for library services and activities and to raise volunteers or volunteer support for the library's activities, as well as the friends activities, and financial support for items and activities outside the library's annual budget. So, it's an exciting little group and these little groups are, as Brett mentioned, across the county.

(Interlude music playing)

Deb

I just wanted to mention something. We had the wonderful history of K.C.'s involvement, which really got this all off the ground, but I wanted to mention on behalf of the friends, the amazing trio that actually kept the friends together during the COVID period. The friends had been a very active organization, building the South Welcome Library earlier, and then things changed and then COVID hit. It really made it difficult for the friends to engage in activities and do the things that friends do - raise awareness, participate in fundraising, et cetera. So, Bev Crowder, Patty Smith, and Linda Holmes, three amazing, dynamic women, kept the group going, recruited a brand new 9-member board and handed the organization off to us with their goodwill, their amazing organizational skills and the ability to pick up a phone and call them anytime we needed. So, our hats off to these ladies.

Nancy

Liz, could I mention a couple of things just about our own event out at Glenhaven? So, we just want to clear it up for everybody that the South Whatcom Library jazz event is being held in Glenhaven. And for those of you who may not know where that is, it's on Cain Road, out south of Sudden Valley and as you get to Glenhaven on Cane Road you just take a right, or a left depending on which direction you're coming from on Glenhaven Drive, it's where the Glenhaven Country store is. We're going to have a sign out there with balloons on it and everything, so you'll know where to turn.

Brett

So, one thing to remember about all three, they're free and you can go to all three. The Glenhaven one is outdoors at 2:00 o'clock on a Saturday, and it's a great family event. And then the Ferndale one is in the library and the Blaine one is in the Performing Arts Center, which is a huge, beautiful building. So, there's three different bands at each one and the music's a little different. The South Whatcom one is a little more Latin and dancy flavor. And the Ferndale one is a trio, so it's a little more intimate. And the one at the William Pacific Art Center is a five piece with two tenor saxophones, a stand-up bass, a drummer and a percussionist, which is also very bouncy. Ferndale and Blaine's are in the evening I believe, 7:00 to 8:00. So, three different opportunities for three different experiences that all support the libraries, so it's not just seeing the same band at different locations or something like that.

Liz

It's also three opportunities to head to your local library. So, we have three free kids programs as well, in line with the concerts at each location. So, for the South Whatcom Library, you can check out Junior Groove on June 30th between 1:30 and 2:30. So, we are going to have some tambourine, some music going. We're going to have a bunch of jazz related materials for kids so they can hear the music, play the music and then take home books about it. So that's just going to be fantastic. And for the Ferndale and Blaine locations, they have their Junior Grooves programs on the Friday before their concerts. You can find all of this information on our website at wcls.org/jazz. You'll find all of these great events. They're all free, but you might want to register for the jazz concerts to reserve your seat. I know that for the South Whatcom we're going to be outdoors, so you might want to bring a picnic blanket and be prepared to spread out on the grass. Carpooling is encouraged for that one as well. Some of the other venues are a little bit bigger, but this afternoon concert will just be a little bit different.

Brett

And all of the events have drawings. For fun and prizes, along with jazz music and fun with your local library and library patrons.

Liz

The South Whatcom Glenhaven concert will also have a pop-up library where you'll see some familiar faces. I'll be there alongside my colleague Mary. We'll have a whole bunch of fun jazz materials to pick up, stickers and bookmarks to hand out. You can bring your furry friend. We've got dog biscuits. It would just be nice to see you out and about in Glenhaven. And that really is one of the benefits of these jazz concerts, being able to bring the library out where the people are. At the South Whatcom Library we service not just Sudden Valley, but Geneva and Glenhaven. So, Glenhaven they get bookmobile visits regularly, but we are their home branch, so it's really important for us to be out and about and to let us meet the community there. We'd hope that it would encourage them to stop on by the library and browse the stacks.

(Interlude music plays)

Brett

One reason why this came together the way it did and the reason why it's jazz when there's a lot other great types of music and musicians in town is that Whatcom County has a really thriving community of

professional jazz musicians and people who have come from around the world. And in this case, who out of these three bands, some of the musicians are in one or two of the bands and play together in different ways. So, for instance, Bilongo who is playing at Sudden Valley concert, is led by Steve Jones - I'm trying to remember Steve's last name. He's the chairman of the board of the Bellingham Jazz Center and he's an amazing percussionist. And Sabrina Gomez, who is a very, very well-loved vocalist in town is in that band, and might be one of the members who is in the Jerry Steinhilber Explosion. A couple of those people are obviously in the Jerry Steinhilber Trio.

Jerry is an amazing drummer and drum teacher here. He and his best friends since they were 18 and met at Berkeley School of Music, King Dahl, who plays the stand-up bass are kind of the crux of that band and I believe one or two of the other musicians in their band are musicians who have also played around the country and to some degree this is also celebrating the fact that we have these really well-seasoned professional, creative, amazing, talented musicians in our community. Bilongo is a Latin jazz group, whereas the trio is focused more on blue note and impact 1960s type of jazz. If you like John Coltrane or Miles Davis or Dexter Gordon, people like that, it's more in that vein. The songs that they choose to put together are ones that people really know and love and are really fun to listen to and to dance if you're so inclined.

So, it's just a really nice blend of multiple wonderful resources that we have in our community and an opportunity for people to experience all of these things, including with the library. A lot of people don't realize how much the library offers and how many ways that you can enjoy things from the library, and Liz obviously knows way more than I do, but we think of books, but we don't necessarily think about even DVD's or movies or periodicals or all the wonderful events that they do for kids that bring people together. So, for folks who may not already realize that and know what's going on with the library, they might come out for the jazz and be talking to the folks at the library and realize there's all these other ways that they should be using the library.

Liz

That is such a good point. That makes me think of the very cool Whatcom Grooves playlist that was just put out on Freegal. And if you hadn't heard of Freegal, this is your free music streaming service through the library, so make sure to check it out. And I do want to say from the library standpoint, it has been such a joy to be able to work with all these different Friends groups from the Blaine, Ferndale, South Whatcom Library. To see all the energy and passion that these people bring. This concert series is so much fun, and it's also a pretty big lift, so these are all volunteers doing this work, planning and making the day happen and hoping to make it an annual offering to the community. So, I really want to thank each friends group but, because I've got these ones here, I want to thank the South Whatcom Friends.

Nancy

Well, thank you, Liz. You know, I'm really excited. Especially after Brett's description of the bands and the history behind it. I am a reader, I have been since I was very, very tiny. I have to have my next book ready right after I finish the last book. We're trying to bring communities together and raise awareness of the library and what better way to bring people together than to provide music. I'm a jazz lover. Brett, you mentioned Coltrane, you mentioned Brubeck and you mentioned Miles. I've seen and heard live concerts, all three of those, and it's just invigorating. It's so exciting. I can't wait for these concerts.

Neil

Well, I wanted to step in here. This is Neil in case you didn't recognize my voice, but because of what you're saying here, it makes me want to ask each one of you what you would recommend and I'll give you some options, either a jazz album that you love, like what's the first one that comes to your mind, or a book if you have a good book that's either jazz related or not. I like to get book recommendations from people for whatever I do. So, can I have us go around the table here and talk about a good book or a good jazz album or an artist that is someone you would recommend.

Nancy

I'll jump in first. I'm going to do both. First of all, my all-time favorite is Dave Brubeck and his sons. Well, Dave, of course is passed, but he was amazing, amazing artist and I have been at his concert's live multiple times and my husband, Paul and I listened to him at home quite frequently actually. My favorite author, now it's just really hard because I'm an avid reader and I read all kinds, all genres, and I guess the first thing that pops into my mind is the author, Nelson de Mille. He has an intelligence and military background. He writes fiction, but it's based on a lot of history and real events. And I would say the two books at the top of my list for him would be *Plum Island* and *The Charm School*. If you're at all interested in intelligence and behind the scenes in our government, I would recommend it.

Deb

Well, I have to say I do not have the intimate knowledge of particular musicians or authors in the jazz scene that my colleagues Brett and Nancy have. I am more of the feeling sense. I went to graduate school in Kansas, in Lawrence, KS, just outside of Kansas City. Kansas City, is a hub for the old jazz. And we used to have incredible performers come to the little club and they were packed, person to person, sitting, standing one on top of another. With these incredible performers and I just love the feeling that they that their music evokes and the way they bring people together. And so, I'm really looking forward to this experience as an opportunity to hear the kind of music that really brings people together and so I'm really excited about this, Brett. How about you?

Brett

I hate favorites because it's hard. I can't always answer that, but if people aren't that familiar with jazz, they've probably heard things from Miles Davis *Kind of Blue* album in restaurants and places. There have been many, many, many times, so if you don't know that much about jazz, that might be a nice place to start, because everyone loves that album. There are lots of great autobiographies and books on jazz. The thing that I would share is actually more the movie *Soul*. I watched how friends with young kids learned about jazz for the first time and really loved it when they watched that. And so that's a good way for kids to learn about it, especially now we don't really listen to the radio like we did. And there may not be that kind of exposure. And so, it's a great movie with a great message and great music in it at the same time.

Nancy

I think there was a couple mentions actually about these concerts are free. We are asking though that people pre-register so that we'll know how many folks to expect. So, you can go to wcls.org/jazz. So, sign up and we'll see you there.

Brett

And one thing we're really focused on is bringing new people to the library and having people get library cards who don't have them already. So, if you are a library person, you have neighbors and you have friends and they have families and one reason why we have the different concerts in different areas at different times of day is to have more options for people to come. For example, the South Whatcom event happening in Glenhaven is at 2:00 PM on a Saturday, which is a great time for families to come have fun and you could also invite neighbors or relatives or coworkers to either join you or meet you there or bring their kids and their families because it's a great event and just experience to have with friends and family. So beyond just your immediate friends or family, you might want to think of others who either you just want to have a really nice afternoon with, or people who may enjoy the jazz or want to learn more about the library. There are many, many reasons to come and have fun and join us.

Neil

Bring a friend, please. You will enjoy it. And they will thank you and get everyone signed up for library cards. Any last words, Liz?

Liz

I'll just say thank you, Brett, Deb and Nancy for joining us here today. Hope that you out there will all join us for this summer of jazz music and celebrating libraries and thank you, Neil, for having us.

(Interlude music playing)

Neil: Well, that's our show. I want to thank our guests, Liz Andre from the South Whatcom Library and from the Friends of the South Whatcom Library, Deb Wibe, Nancy Wyen and Brett Green.

Thanks also to Jerry Steinhilber who supplied most of the soundtrack to this podcast.

Check out wcls.org/jazz for dates and locations of these amazing jazz concerts and find more links and show notes at wcls.org/podcast.

A thousand thanks go out to my boss Mary Vermillion. In the words of Dave Brubeck, "Jazz stands for freedom. It's supposed to be the voice of freedom: Get out there and improvise, and take chances, and don't be a perfectionist - leave that to the classical musicians."

And thanks to our listeners. I hope you get out to these concerts and participate in our Summer Reading activities. Let's get some trees planted!