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LAPD Band

by Christina Challey

From a Balalaika Group (balalaika is a Russian stringed musical instrument), to a herald-trained concert violinist, LAPD Band member Nancy Nelson's family has a history filled with musicians and performers. Her Uncle Jack was in Vaudeville; her Uncle Max, the concert violinist, moonlighted as "Carlos Cortez" with his Latin combo; and her brother went through prep school on a clarinet scholarship!



At recruit graduation.

Nancy grew up in Detroit. She said she always wanted to play the saxophone from the first time she heard one on TV. Her parents had started her on piano lessons, and she did try playing guitar and ukulele on her own, but it was the saxophone that captured her heart. Finally, at age 10, when her brother got a clarinet scholarship to college and left his saxophone at home, she had her chance.

Even though Nancy had begun playing the saxophone at 10, she said nobody in her family took her seriously. It wasn't until she started college that her talent was finally recognized. With a major in Music, along with lessons on the saxophone, Nancy said she also had to learn to play the clarinet, flute and drums. Although she is glad she had the opportunity to learn these additional instruments, she said she is definitely not a drum, flute or clarinet player.

Nancy played first alto sax and took lessons from Herb Coof, who played clarinet in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. At that time, Herb had created a saxophone that was made at the Kethworth Factory in Germany. "I think Herb's early

sax creations, before he sold out to Armstrong, were the best saxs in the world," Nancy said. "I never drank the 'Selmer Mark 6 Koot-AM' L.O.C."

After her lessons with Herb Coof, Nancy went on to play saxophone with an all-girl wedding band. She also had an offer to play in a rock band, but she ultimately turned it down. She said all she really wanted to do was find a "real job" because that would only take up eight hours of her day. She could then spend the rest of the time practicing and playing the sax. Although this sounded like a great idea, she said the reality was that once she started her "real job," she didn't have the time to practice or play, so her saxophone wound up going by the wayside.

Nancy's "real job" turned out to be as a real estate appraiser in Los Angeles, which she said she really enjoyed. Now retired, Nancy is enjoying getting back to her saxophone (the tenor sax this time) and taking lessons from the excellent teacher and pro sax player Donna Schwartz. She says Donna is taking her back to square one and giving her the foundation she never had before.

Along with Donna, Nancy's favorite sax players are John Coltrane and Coleman Hawkins. Her favorite music for sax is jazz and blues, although she also favors rock, Baroque, musicals and old standards.



Yamaha booth at NAMM Show.

She came from a family that listened exclusively to classical, but she says she can listen to Willie Nelson for hours!

Her main hobbies are crocheting, baking, St. Bernards and acting. She took an acting workshop for several years but said she didn't want to spend her retirement going to auditions. The LAPD Band is lucky Nancy returned to playing the sax—and she is definitely taken seriously!

For more information about the LAPD Band, please contact Jim Starr, executive director: smg@lapd.com. For greatly appreciated donations, please go to www.lapdofficerfoundation.org, and in the "Notes box," put "for the Band." ♦



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