

Copyright: October 14, 2007

By: Laura Deni

AND THE BAND PLAYED ON - BOB HARDWICK PLAYING FOR THE RICH AND FAMOUS



The Bob Hardwick Sound

There is something different about the rich. They can afford good music.

They also know that a great band can equate big bucks at charity benefits.

Catering to that crowd has been a niche market, around since the early 30s, envied by many but whose inner sanctum has been entered by only a select few.

To succeed, the person has to know both the rules of musicianship as well as the rules of etiquette. It's not required to be born with a silver spoon - but it helps to feel natural about being polite and using good manners.

A plus is possessing innate knowledge about what music to play when the wedding cake suddenly crashes to the floor. *Slip, Slidin' Away* probably isn't a good choice.

Those that have made it work include Lester Lannon, who didn't retire from the black tie circuit until he was 93, the late Eddie Duchin whose career was immortalized in the lovely movie *The Eddie Duchin Story*, which starred Tyrone Power and Kim Novak. Peter Duchin, who carried on his father's legacy and created his own following, and the sought after Bob Hardwick.

Having just returned to his Manhattan apartment from providing the music for last week's opening of the Harman Performing Arts Center in Washington, D.C., ([See Broadway To Vegas column of October 7, 2007](#)) Hardwick spoke with Broadway To Vegas about the musical art form of playing for the rich and famous.

Years ago when every Las Vegas hotel had a live orchestra, some musicians complained that the 99-cent shrimp cocktail had bigger letters on the marquee than the name of the orchestra playing in the main show room. Do society band leaders ever feel they are second place to the entree?

"First of all, I don't ever consider that I am taking second place to anything," responded Hardwick, who has a keen insight into what makes an event succeed.

"There are too many elements that go into making a great party. First of all, the people who are there. It involves certainly the music, the background music, the food - everything. I'm not trying to come in and shine above everybody else. I just want to contribute as much as anybody else to make the party great."

Raised in a Louisville, KY banking family it was just *assumed* that he would go into the banking business. "Yes, but I had this musical talent which came from my mother's side of the family. Her sister, Marjorie Warden, was a soloist with a symphony in New York and co-starred in plays with Helen Hayes. She died very, very early of pneumonia when they weren't able to treat it."



Born with perfect pitch Hardwick's prodigious ability as a pianist was recognized early, including being accepted for private study by the University of Louisville School of Music at age twelve. Upbringing steered him towards the more reliable world of finance. He earned a BA in business from Centre College, completed graduate music studies in classical and jazz at the University of North Texas and then studied composition with Hall Overton at the Julliard School of Music. He also received a Downbeat Magazine award scholarship to Berklee School of Music in Boston.

For 12 years he led two lives - by day the button down banker for originally Citibank and then U.S. Trust. At night he was the black-tied musician playing for the social elite.

During any spare time he composed with Bob Crow, the man who would go on to write *Can't Take My Eyes Off You* and *Rag Doll*. Jointly they

created several numbers which were recorded on the Electra Label. Hardwick scored two television series *The Home Front* on PBS and *Hunters in the Sky*, a 13 part series which originally aired in 1991 on the Discovery Channel.



In 1989 while playing a Kentucky Derby party in Louisville, Hardwick met film star Gregory Peck. "A career in the arts," intoned Peck, "is always preferable."

Gregory Peck told banker Hardwick: "A career in the arts is always preferable."

"I'll never forget that comment. And, coming from him, said in that deep voice and commanding way, it *really did* have an effect of me."

Hardwick closed his employment account at the bank and concentrated on playing.

Society orchestra aren't usually a fixed frame group. Nor is the work steady. Depending upon the season the offers can pour in. Other times, the social season is on vacation. Size also matters. Sometimes a gig might only need a trio. Other times a full orchestra. There is also something to be said for location, location, location. You'd get the job if only you were there.

Orchestra leaders figured that out decades ago and learned to serve the duo role of also being a band agency. In doing so, they landed the job, but that also put their names and reputation on the shoulders of the musicians who played under their name. Thus it is possible to have an infinite number of different orchestras playing in various places in one night, under the same band name. For example, on Millennium Eve there were seven Bob Hardwick Sound groups performing at seven different social parties, all billed as The Bob Hardwick Sound.

That's stress of the prestissimo fortississimo kind.

"We spend a *lot* of time trying to make sure that those groups are as good as possible and are representative of what we do," Hardwick stressed.

"Absolutely, I audition them myself. I listen to everybody. We have a pool of about 35 to 40 musicians. Before any get into that pool I have personally heard them and approved of them."

"We're not trying to be something we're not. I will tell you, for instance, we just got a wedding situation where they want a chamber orchestra playing a Bach violin concerto. I happen to have studied classical music and I'm probably going to join part of that. We basically can contract out to other musicians anything that we don't specifically do. We do two huge balls based on a European tradition with 30 piece orchestras, so we can add musicians for whatever purpose."



Being a society musician means you're not going to be playing in some ratty old hole of a space that claims to be a cabaret. On the other hand, there are people to please and the musical selections are not necessarily band picks.

The musicians need to be tipped off not to play a popular song, if that ditty was called *our song* by the bride when she was dating a different guy than the one she just married.

"Absolutely, people tell us songs not to play," said Hardwick. "We get song lists in a lot of situations and we are happy to play whatever people want. We also get some songs that they do not want to hear. I try to point out to people that we are there to please, If they don't want to hear a song, they don't have to. Occasionally, when we are asked not to do a song - if I know that song is a huge button pusher - I will let them know. I'll say - this is still your decision. But, I will guarantee that your guests, based upon every job that I have very done, love that song. So, if they still don't want it, we are happy not to play it. Ninety percent of the time they say - Okay, if people really love it that much, go ahead and play it."



Princess Michael of Kent, Bob Hardwick and Ivana Trump brought down the house with a rendition of *Give Me The Simple Life*.

You need to know how to have fun without being offensive.

Queen Elizabeth's second son, Prince Andrew attended the Royal Academy of Arts gala dinner dance at the Rainbow Room. When he mentioned that his apartment at Buckingham Palace was being redecorated, Hardwick

For musicians living in mayor cities where society orchestras are in demand, the work is home based, lucrative and respected. The more versatile the musician, the more gigs.

"Probably there aren't as many musicians that *fake* as well as they used to," admitted Hardwick. "In terms of the art form, when you are *faking*, what you are doing is playing by ear," he explained. "It means you have an excellent ear and you can create harmonies on the spur of the moment and remember most of the melodies. Probably to that extent, a lot of the musicians are not as adept as they used to be."

"On the other hand, I've noticed recently that a lot of the younger guys really are taking it up again," he quickly added. "They are trying to be rock musicians and if they don't make the grade as a rock musician, signed by Sony or Arista or one of the big labels, they revert back to this music. Lately, we've got some really good, younger people. The tone of our band is very young looking."

It used to be that guys grabbed a guitar and formed a garage band operating under the delusion that all it took was the cultivation of three chords and an attitude. Today, Hardwick reports a return to the days when musicians actually *knew music*.

"They are playing different instruments, not just guitar. There are plenty of pianists, trumpet players - we can get what we need."

Performing in a society orchestra is a happy date. The functions are what they have always been - joyous family celebrations, significant charity events and laudatory business occasions. The participants are dressed nicely and smell good.

The checks clear the bank the first time. The only thing that has changed is the music.

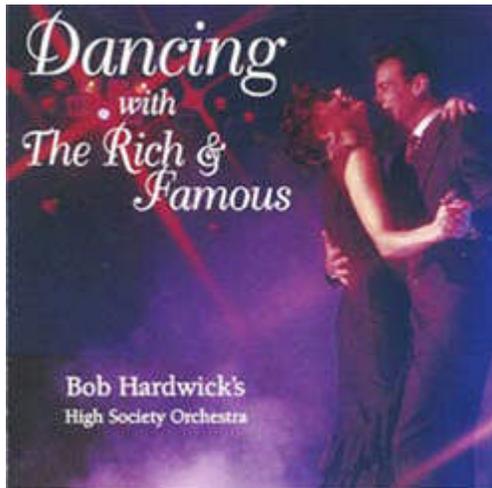
Back in the 1930s -1940s, dancing involved *everybody* - the twinkletoed and those with two left feet.

Society bands played *sweet* or they played *swing*. Many of these bands developed some sort of quickly recognizable sound; a gimmick.



According to historian Murray L. Pfeffer, "Gray Gordon developed a sound using temple blocks as his trademark, and was widely known as Gray Gordon and his Tick Tock Rhythm. Shep Fields had one of the sidemen blowing bubbles through a straw in a glass of water, and his band came to be called Shep Fields and His Rippling Rhythm."

Hardwick's *gimmick* is to be able to play a variety of music.



"I'm musically all over the place because I really love it all. I feel that one of the reasons we do pop-rock for instance is - I don't just *try* to do it well, I absolutely *love it*. Frankly, it was my favorite music growing up, along with jazz."

"Even though our category is Society Orchestra, rock and roll and pop probably end up being 45-50 percent of what we might do in an evening. So, it's not quite the same music that it used to be in terms of what people used to call a

Society Orchestra."

That versatility was a boon for last week's opening of the Harman Center for the Arts in Washington, D.C.

Gala chair was Ann Kendall Richards Nitze of Washington, DC. Nitze is a private art dealer in New York, Washington and Aspen. She specializes in 19th and 20th century paintings and sculptures.



Ann Nitze knows how to chair

Educated at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, CT and then Academic Julian in Paris and Sophia University in Tokyo, this lady - who serves on the board of the Santa Fe Institute, The Sotheby's Institute, London, the Thai Support Foundation, and the National Advisory Board of the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum - has a number of black tie chair notches on her couture belt.

"We were hired by Ann Nitze. She pointed out to me at the very beginning that one of the committee members thought they should also hire a rock band," divulged Hardwick. "She had told them that wasn't necessary. She had used us before in New York and knew we could play big band music, society music, Sinatra or pop rock and that's why she hired us."

Being knowledgeable is a plus for either a party planning agency or the individual chairman.

"I find that a lot of party planners are really good, but sometimes they don't know that much about what we do," he said referring to the music. "There are many party planners who can create beautiful results with certain ideas and I'm happy to work with any party planner."

Then there is the tense, nouveau socialite who is a committee chair virgin.

Hardwick is diplomatic.

"There are times when somebody might have the wrong idea and in a very nice way, I just try to point that out. That isn't the way it should be done - perhaps it should be done another way. But, if they want it done that way, we're hear to please."

That doesn't mean there aren't disasters.



"Several years ago we were playing one wedding and a four or five tier cake literally did fall down. The orchestra was up on the stage and the cake was on the floor. Somebody had bumped into it. I frankly wonder why it doesn't happen more often. I see these incredibly beautiful cakes and they are in an area where people are coming close to where they could knock the table over."

"We often might have to play to cover up mistakes," he laughed. "It's part of the motto of the show must go on. People don't know what goes on behind the stage. I often marvel where five minutes before the doors open you say - there is *no way* this place can be in order. And, all of a sudden five minutes later, it magically is in order."

Hardwick's musical happening started out word of mouth. People who had a good time gossiped about the event the next day. If you're good, they'll



Barbara and President George Bush in front of Hardwick's bandstand at one of the inaugural balls. ask you to play and Hardwick's ability put him in demand.

He's performed at five presidential inaugural balls - President George W. Bush, George Bush, Sr., Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford.

Blue bloods cutting a rug under his baton have included; Prince Charles, Prince Phillip, Prince Andrew, Princess Margret, Duke & Duchess of Kent, Princess Margriet of the Netherlands, Queen Nor, Princess of Sweden, The Honorable Pieter Vollenhoven, Baron Von Thyssen, Prince

Albert and Princess Stephanie of Monaco.

Just another bandstand gig has meant; Party of the Century - Versailles Palace, 100th Anniversary of the Newport Breakers, Kluge Birthday Party, Washington Corcoran Ball, Spanish Institute Ball, Amfar at Lincoln Center with Leonard Bernstein, Mike Nichols and Diane Sawyer, Marvin Davis 50th Wedding Anniversary, Turkey at the Ritz Cabaret in London, The Swan Ball in Nashville, Buffalo Bill Cody Museum Gala in Wyoming, Ross Perot's Birthday in Bermuda, Mary Lou Whitney's Anniversary Party in Lexington, Opening of Mrs. Lyndon Baines Johnson's Wildflower Center in Austin, Biltmore Centennial in Ashville, Mardi Gras Queen's Supper in New Orleans, Kentucky Derby Madden Party in Lexington, Historic Charleston 50th Anniversary, Dupont Family Reunion in Wilmington, Edgar Bronfman Parties in New York & Charlottesville, Washington Opera Fundraiser in Washington, DC, and the Palm Beach Preservation Society Ball.



Rudy Giuliani and Bob Hardwick. Giuliani decided on Sarah Brightman's *Deliver Me* for wedding reception first dance with Judith

Wedding have included the knot tying of Lisa McFadden and George Melas in New York. His band accompanied Aretha Franklin at the wedding of Al Gore's daughter, Karenn. Hardwick played at what the *New York Times* called "the wedding of the year " - that of Judith Nathan to Rudolph W. Giuliani, who exchanged vows on the lawn of Gracie Mansion with Mayor Bloomberg presiding.

When Hardwick played for the Martha's Vineyard's wedding of Jay Eastman, son of New York lawyer John Eastman to Katama Guernsey, one of the guests was former Beatle Paul McCartney, who has always remained closed to his late wife Linda's family and Jay was Linda's nephew. Paul joined Hardwick to entertain the 300 guests with a rousing rendition of *When The Saints Go Marching In*. Then McCartney joined the Hardwick

musicians by playing trumpet and capped off the evening by singing a special song for the bride and groom - his own composition of *I Saw Her Standing There*.

Requests for The Hardwick Sound are now coming in five years ahead of the date.

Keeping the calendar correct is Courtney Cramer. "She is enrolled in the Master Program for the NYU Music Business School. She is the coordinator who sets most of these things up with the party planners and hosts or hostesses," he said.

"For the next two months we are *heavily* booked for weddings and we also have several charity events and openings of buildings in New York. We're planning weddings next year in France, and Antigua is April. There is a lot going on."

"We just got a called for a booking in 2012," he said with a surprised tone. "It has to do with a 100th anniversary of a club. We get booked for things two and three years in advance, but five is getting out there. It's not a record. I was once booked six years in advance. But the majority of things gets booked between six and nine months, to a year in advance."

Hardwick feels his own business background is a boon.

"I am a little different in that respect. I did grow up in a banking background and I was very interested in business. I enjoy the business aspect of it, but a lot of musicians don't. Looking at an event from the business side is just as important and fun for me as looking from it from the music side, so I get something out of both."