

A dozen saxophones, firing up the holiday spirit

John W. Barry, Poughkeepsie Journal 10:24 a.m. EST December 16, 2015



There is little more I enjoy than watching a musician, or a whole room full of musicians, pushing the boundaries of artistic expression.

When things really get going, it can feel like a locomotive has just barreled through the room.

All of this was on my mind earlier this week while chatting with Charles Gray, a Town of Poughkeepsie resident who is the founder and bass saxophone player in the Hudson Valley Saxophone Orchestra. Gray was giving me the lowdown on a gig the orchestra has this Sunday at the Cunneen-Hackett Center in the City of Poughkeepsie.

The group is set to play two shows Sunday, at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. A \$5 suggested donation gets you in the door. Christmas songs will be performed.

“For those people who are sick of what you hear on the radio, this is perfect,” he said.

The thing about this gig that really caught my attention — and is sure to grab your ears Sunday — is that there will be 12 saxophones propelling this performance. That’s a lot of momentum, but it will be framed by just the right amount of nuance, according to Gray.

Proceeds from these performances will benefit the Dutchess Community College Hudson Valley Saxophone Orchestra Music Scholarship and the Chamber Foundation’s Charles S. North Music Scholarship.

(Continued on back.)

The Chamber Foundation is affiliated with the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce. North retired at the end of 2014 as president and chief executive officer of the the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce.

At these shows, you can also purchase a copy of the orchestra's Christmas CD, "It's That Time Again," for \$10. Proceeds also benefit the two scholarship funds.

Once I covered the logistics with Gray, I couldn't stop asking him about the feel of the room when you have 12 saxophones on stage. I've seen plenty of bands with horn sections, but I've never been clobbered over the head by a dozen saxophones and I was intrigued.

His response surprised me — and left me even more intrigued.

"It's almost like a string orchestra, but with the versatility to have the power of a jazz setting at times," Gray said. "It's more classical than it is power. It's more delicate.

The Hudson Valley Saxophone Orchestra plays at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. Dec. 20 at the Cunneen-Hackett Arts Center, 12 Vassar St., Poughkeepsie. Tickets will be available at the door. Visit www.hudsonvalleysaxophoneorchestra.com and www.cunneen-hackett.org for information.