

# Dionne Sings

**F**or most folks, the twenty-first birthday is a fairly important one. You probably remember what you did that day, if you're over twenty-one. If you're under twenty-one and you remember your twenty-first birthday, well, you'll have to sort that one out yourself. My twenty-first trip around the sun was in the 1960s, so I would have no memory of it at all were it not for Dionne Warwick.

I was an undergraduate at Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania, and treasurer of "the world's largest jazz club," as we were fond of boasting, with thousands of paying members.

How did we get that membership? Every spring the club's board of directors would convene and decide on the acts that we would hire for the following fall's concerts. We'd try to book two headliners on the popular side of jazz who could pull a mainstream crowd and fill the 7,500-seat rec hall.

We'd have folks like jazz flutist Herbie Mann. Mann singled on the charts in 1961 with "Comin' Home, Baby." We had Ramsey Lewis one year. Jazz pianist Lewis had a crossover hit in 1965 with "The In-Crowd." We also had Dave Brubeck,

with Paul Desmond on sax, Joe Morello on drums, and Ray Brown playing bass. Brubeck was the first jazz artist of his day to appeal to a broader audience, and succeeded wildly with a piece written in 5/4 time called "Take Five."

The revenues from these shows enabled us to have many other, harder-core jazz and blues artists for concerts that were not always profitable. Over the years we hosted: Muddy Waters; Thelonius Monk; John Coltrane; Cannonball Adderly with his brother, Nat Adderly, and saxist Charles Lloyd; Archie Shepp; Horace Silver with Wayne Shorter; Mose Allison with melody drummer Paul Motian; Andrew Hill; and Bill Evans with bassist Eddie Gomez and drummer Marty Morrell. The jazz club was always profitable. At one point we had accumulated so much cash that at my urging we started giving it away to needy causes such as the Committee to Rescue Italian Art, shortly after Florence and Venice experienced catastrophic flooding in 1966.

On the opening day of spring semester, when the student body trooped into the gym to sign up for clubs and activities, the jazz club would have a booth. We'd sell tickets to the headliner concerts we had booked and we'd sell membership in the club. This was the deal: If you bought membership in the jazz club, you got a reduction in ticket price. The reduction was so substantial that if you were buying only two tickets to one show, it was cheaper to pay for membership and get the two reduced-priced tickets than it was to buy two regular-priced tickets without membership. This was the original no-brainer. Even the jocks got it.

On my 21st birthday, in October of 1966, Dionne Warwick came to sing.

*[Continued in the book ...]*