

Memories of Music and Musicians in Cohoes

By Romeo Mitri

From the 1930s to the present, Cohoes has been blessed with many talented musicians. I will share my memories of many of them, with sincere apology to those I have missed.

Many Cohoes musicians played in and directed concert and marching bands. The Troy-based Doring Band was led by Cohoesier George Slater following Doring's death. Slater was also a saxophone baritone player. The Italian Band of Troy was led by Pat Iantono. I also played in this band, as did my father Michael Mitri. Other musicians from Cohoes in the bands were Frank Kendricks, Tommy Williams, Charlie Holden and Frank Gebosky, Sr.

Great musicians from Cohoes who met with success included the five Mastandrea (Americanized to Mastren) brothers: Carmine, Al, Eddy, John and Frank. Carmine and Al played with big bands in New York City, including the Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman bands, and made television appearances. Leo Gibeau, a great sax man, played for a long time in New York City, and then returned to this region to teach music in local schools. Metro Myresko, also a local teacher, played beautiful piano and performed with many area bands. Other Cohoes musicians of note included Roland Avalani, Julio Corona, Danny Desisto, Domenic "Cookie" Pucci, Frank Damico, Harry Taylor, Bob Walters, Richard Cunniff, Danny Desisto, jr., Reno Mencucci, T. Lanue, Dick Shannon, Pat Cappello, the Piwinica Brothers (Ted, Ed and Stan – all trumpet players, and Bill, an accordion player), Frank Marsolais and Jack Kelly.

There were many polka bands in the area because of the large Polish community. Al and John Rymanowski had a popular polka band. Cohoesiers in the band included Harry Suprenant, Stan Connery, Romeo Mitri, Pat Cappello, Ed Piwinica and Tommy Ford. Joe and Stan Kosek had a great polka band, and Pete Serek, Rube Patrician and Al Skawinski all had polka bands.

I came to know most of the City's musicians because I was president of Local 13 AFM for 16 years. I performed with the Albany Symphony, the Rymanowski Polka Band, the Al Cavelari Big Band, the Coliseum Theater orchestra, the orchestra for the Ice Capades and with many other groups. The local musicians were a close-knit group, as they saw each other frequently playing jobs in the area, including concerts, dances, weddings, and special events.



Members of the Rymanowski Polka Band. From left to right: Thomas Ford, John Rymanowski, Al Rymanowski, Ed Piwinica.

Photograph courtesy of Martha and Warren Fitzgerald.