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Gulf Coasting's guide to this weekend, the next 10 days and a month ahead. Go to gulfcoastinglive.com to see full, searchable calendar of events for this week and beyond.

MARC BEAUDIN/SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

Some members of The Stardust Memories Big Band, made up of professional musicians from Southwest Florida. They play Glenn Miller and other music from the big-band era.

Stardust Memories Big Band to debut

Expect hits like 'In the Mood' and more during concert Saturday in Cape Coral

By **Charles Runnells**
crunnells@news-press.com

Craig Christman wasn't alive during the glory days of big-band music, but he knows and loves the hits nonetheless: "In the Mood," "Begin the Beguine," "April in Paris,"

"Moonlight Serenade" "Chattanooga Choo Choo," you name it.

"I've always said I was born in the wrong time," says Christman, 43, of south Fort Myers. "I should have been born in 1920.

"When I hear the music, it brings me a lot of joy. It just makes me feel happy. And to

be able to play it is even better!"

Now Christman hopes to bring that same joy to big-band lovers throughout Southwest Florida. His new Stardust Memories Big Band debuts Saturday with a concert in Cape Coral.

Christman knows he's not alone in his love of Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Tommy Dorsey and other cherished bandleaders from the golden age of

big-band music in the 1920s, '30s and '40s. And he hopes a lot of those fans show up at the Italian American Club to see just what his 18-piece band can do.

Other local bands play this kind of music, including the professional Naples Jazz Orchestra (for which some Stardust Memories members also play). But Christman says his band focuses exclusively on dance-oriented swing music

from the big-band era. And unlike local amateur bands, his group is made up entirely of professionals.

"I thought, boy, if we had professional musicians, we could really do this music justice," Christman says. "It's the best musicians in Southwest Florida. I called them all myself. We've played together in various bands over the course

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of about 20 years.”

The band features musicians from the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra, Southwest Florida Symphony, local churches and colleges, and the pit orchestras for Broadway Palm dinner theater and The Naples Players. It boasts four trumpeters, four trombonists and five saxophone/clarinet players, plus a rhythm section and a guitarist. Christman also hopes to add male and female vocalist sometime soon.

Christman, himself, has played with other local groups (including Southwest Florida Symphony and The Naples Philharmonic Orchestra), and he does freelance work playing clarinet, flute, oboe, English horn and saxophone for touring musicals at Artis-Naples and Barbara B. Mann Performing Arts Hall.

But in the back of his mind, Christman says, he's always wanted more than that. “I wanted to have my own group. This is just something I've wanted to do all my life.”

Christman grew up listening to big-band music in his hometown of Cape Coral.

“My dad played it all the time,” he says, “and I loved it as a kid ... There's just something about the sound of a big band.”

“You hear this music, and it makes you happy. It makes you want to dance.”

Well, it makes other people dance, anyway. Not Christman. He just taps his toes.

“I can't dance,” he says with a grin.

Those old arrangements also have sentimental value for Christman: They're a way he can still connect with his father, Gene Christman, who died when Christman was 17 years old.

“This is a way to keep his memory alive, too,” he says.



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IF YOU GO

» **What:** Stardust Memories Big Band debuts

When: 8-11 p.m. Saturday

Where: The Italian American Club, 4725 Vincennes Blvd., Cape Coral

Tickets: \$35, including dinner (\$32 for club members)

Info: 542-6515 or ccitalianamericanclub.com

More about the band: stardustmemoriesbigband.com

The Stardust Memories Big Band has had only two rehearsals so far in the band room at Florida SouthWestern State College (formerly Edison State College). But these professional musicians are used to reading sheet music and learning it quickly.

The results were obvious at the band's second rehearsal



See The Stardust Memories Big Band rehearse at news-press.com.

last month: Crisp, emotional and entirely danceable versions of brassy big-band classics such as “In the Mood,” “Stardust,” “Don't Be That Way,” “Let's Dance,” “Moonlight Serenade” and “I'm Getting Sentimental Over You.”

Professionals make a world of difference with this music, says trombone player Lex Tsaggaris, 66, who doubles as the band's publicist and business manager.

“If you don't play this tight,” the Naples resident says, “it sounds awful! Most of these songs are very precise.”

Unlike the improvisation-heavy forms of jazz that came later, big-band jazz is highly structured music meant to be

played just as it's written on the page. But the sheet music still leaves sections for improvised solos by Christman and other band members.

“These guys just stand up,” Tsaggaris says, “and they make it up on the spot.”

The band has already recorded high-quality demos of its rehearsals to post on its website. “When people hear our demos,” Christman says, “I want them to think, ‘Wow, that's a local band!’”

Christman hopes word gets out among big-band enthusiasts and that his dream project takes off in Southwest Florida. He wants to play clubs, fundraisers, local dances and wherever else people love and appreciate big-band music done well.

“Our mission is to keep this music alive,” he says. “We're really going for the nostalgia factor. We want to be a musical time machine.”

Auditions scheduled

The Southwest Florida Symphony, Lee County's only professional orchestra, will hold auditions from Oct. 8-11.

These are blind auditions, judged by a panel of five musicians, including Maestro Nir Kabaretti. Positions being auditioned are:

» Section violin, seven positions open; auditions happen Oct. 8;

» Second oboe and second trumpet; auditions Oct. 9;

» Principal viola and section cello; auditions Oct. 10; and

» Principal keyboard and section percussion auditions take place Oct. 11.

Auditions will be approximately 10 minutes long and will consist of required excerpts, solo selection(s) and sight-reading. Required repertoire and excerpts are available at swflso.org under the About Us drop down menu or by emailing aalbanel@swflso.org.

Qualified musicians should send a one-page resume to the Southwest Florida Symphony Office at 8290 College Parkway, Suite 103, Fort Myers, FL 33919, in care of personnel manager Alex Albanese. Alternately, a digital resume may be emailed to aalbanel@swflso.org.

Resumes and a \$40 refundable deposit are due by Sept. 21. Phone calls regarding these positions will not be accepted.



THE NEWS-PRESS FILE PHOTO

Conductor Nir Kabaretti