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[In the Christmas swing](#)

Beantown Orchestra brings live music to Cabot Street Cinema Theatre this weekend

By Will Broaddus Staff writer



John Stevens, seated left, lead singer of the Beantown Swing Orchestra, recently rehearsed with the Endicott Singers, led by director Becca Kenneally of Marblehead, seated at right, for their upcoming appearance with the band at the Cabot Street Cinema Theatre in Beverly. The students are, in back row, from left (not including bass player and Stevens): Ashley Whippen, Ipswich; Deanna Christopher, Chelmsford; Alanna Thompson, Hampstead, N.H.; Thomas Smoker, Essex; Andrew Hankinson, Essex; Joe Andreassi (hands raised), Falmouth; middle row, from left, Jen Ellms, New London, N.H.; Kc Schuck, Marston Mills; Olivia Vastola, Manchester, Vt.; Cobi Adrian, Amenia, N.Y.; Andrew Whippen, Ipswich; Tom Butcher, Beverly; front row, from left, Gabby Chinigo, Preston, Conn.; Lia Mastrocola, Stoneham; Kelly Brewer, Berlin; Amelia Maietta, Mendon; Becca Kenneally (director, seated) Marblehead; Emily Hoffman, Natick.

BEVERLY — Christmas will swing into Beverly this Saturday night, when the Beantown Swing Orchestra plays holiday tunes at the Cabot Street Cinema Theatre.

The 18-piece orchestra will be fronted by vocalists John Stevens and Jen Hirsh, who both appeared on “American Idol,” and scat singer Laura Brunner.

“Stevens specializes in Sinatra,” said Frank Hsieh, who has managed Beantown since founding the group in 2006.

“His nickname was ‘Teen Martin’ when he was on ‘Idol,’” because he sounds so much like singer and actor Dean Martin, Hsieh said. “He joined the band in 2008 and brought a whole new dimension to the band.”

The orchestra’s musicians also include many recent graduates from Berklee College of Music and the New England Conservatory of Music, and they will be joined onstage by the Endicott Singers from Endicott College.

“The Endicott Singers will perform our big band version of ‘The Twelve Days of Christmas’ with us,” Hsieh said, “as well as their own special arrangement of ‘Auld Lang Syne’ a cappella.”

While they are entertaining the audience, the Beantown Orchestra will also make local history, as the first new act to appear at the Cabot in 35 years.

Le Grand David and His Own Spectacular Magic Company, which first performed at the Cabot on Feb. 20, 1977, appeared there continuously until shortly after founder Cesario Pelaez’s death this March.

The only other performers to appear onstage have been guest magicians who occasionally joined the troupe in a performance, said David Bull, who appeared as Le Grand David.

“I can count on one hand, but certainly no more than two hands, the number of times that happened,” said Bull, who is president of White Horse Productions, which manages both the Cabot and another theater in Beverly, The Larcom.

Bull has given up performing as Le Grand David for now, but he will act as master of ceremonies Saturday, when he introduces the Beantown Swing Orchestra.

“This is exactly the kind of thing to bring into the Cabot, as well as the Larcom Theatre,” said Bull, who is talking with booking agents to find other acts that would also be right for the theaters he runs.

“I’m hoping when I go out on stage to introduce the orchestra Saturday, we’ll have the next event we can talk about,” he said.

Bull isn’t ruling out a return to the stage to perform magic, but he suggested that it will be in a different format from past performances by the company.

“I would be surprised if there’s anything before next autumn,” he said. “And at that point, how we envision it is, any stage magic performance will be part of a larger menu of entertainment choices.”

Hsieh is delighted to be playing at the Cabot, which was purchased and restored by Pelaez and the magic company in 1976 and was originally built as a vaudeville theater in 1920.

“This type of venue is perfect for us,” Hsieh said. “We’re the same kind of band that was performing during the time when the theater opened.

“It was built in the ’20s for an all-acoustic band, even big bands back in the day,” he said. “The only thing we amplify are the vocalists.”

The orchestra’s classic big band sound is created by its three horn sections, with five saxophones, four trumpets and four trombones, each working with and around a melody.

“You need to have all the horns to get the big band sound,” said Hsieh, who has degrees in engineering and business and has loved swing music since he started playing saxophone in a band at Lexington High School. “Without that, you don’t have harmonies, and it’s not full.”

Behind every big band is an arranger, and Hsieh feels that Beantown’s 27-year-old Danny Fratina, another Berklee graduate, is “the best at what he does.”

Swing arrangements make sophisticated fun out of simple melodies that everybody knows.

“There are so many things going on,” Hsieh said. “The five saxes are playing four-part harmony. Same with the trombones, and the four trumpets. But each section is playing different things, and there’s interplay between the different sections.”

The band will play two shows and will feature songs from its CD “A Beantown Christmas.”

“It’s all holiday tunes, mostly traditional holiday songs and some of our originals,” Hsieh said, “and all arranged by us in the big band styles.”

If you go What: Beantown Swing Orchestra Where: Cabot Street Cinema Theatre, 286 Cabot St., Beverly When: Saturday, Dec. 8, with shows at 4 and 8 p.m. More information: Tickets are \$15 for family show, 4 to 5 p.m., and \$25 for evening show, from 8 to 10 p.m., at www.beantownswing.com/shows.