
September, 2026

The ATJS Jazz Messenger is circulated mostly by e-mail, and is published as we have an important message or gather enough material to assemble a new issue. We are approaching our 2026-27 season, as good an occasion as any to crank out a new issue.

President's Message by Dave Stoddard



The Austin Traditional Jazz Society opens its 2026-27 season at a crossroads. On the plus side, this is our 50th anniversary season. The Society has an enviable history, and up to this point has survived when many jazz societies have folded. We have a strong lineup of events. The publicity campaigns we hope to run may improve our concert attendance and membership.

On the negative side, the Society has run at a net loss since resuming operations after the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, we were replacing members about as fast as they left us. When operations resumed in 2022, half of the membership was gone and we have made no headway in rebuilding our ranks.

It is important to sign up existing and new members, attract as many paying guests as possible, and hope that our contributors can help close the gap. Recent changes to the IRS standard deduction make it very difficult for many people to claim donations as a tax deduction. Please be assured that donations to the Society are now more meaningful than ever.

Unfortunately membership dues and admissions are not enough to cover the cost of doing business. The Society built up a reserve fund during the good years. The Board had to dip into it the last two seasons for the first time in many years. This and our income will see the Society through a few years to come. The future of the Society is in doubt, however.

There is also the matter of Society leadership. The Board has gone from eleven Directors to only seven. Most of the current Directors have many years of board service and are wearing down. If at least three new Directors cannot be found, willing to serve at least three years and transition the Society to a new leadership team, this may be the Society's last season. The current Directors are willing to give newcomers the benefit of their experience and show them the ropes, but the Society cannot expect the current board to stay intact forever.

Nominations for Director are now open until the October concert. If you have ever thought about being on the Board, this is a good chance to find out what it is like. You can self-nominate or have someone nominate you either by e-mail at info@atjs.org or orally at the September or October concerts.

Qualifications for Director are simple—you must be a current member and be willing to work for the betterment of the Society. We will try to find suitable assignments for any new Director, but business, marketing or computer skills would be helpful. I am acting as Treasurer, so an accountant or bookkeeper would be a welcome addition to the Board.

Something to keep in mind is that the Society does more than simply present concert events. It posts on a variety of public media. The Society website gets views from all over the United States and a number of foreign countries. The newsletter seeks to contain jazz scholarship. One of the Society's functions is to promote traditional forms of jazz in the Central Texas area. The calendar of local events is updated monthly, and on occasion the Society will reach out to its mailing list and beyond to promote an event in which it has no financial interest.

Recently a local jazz band was holding an important event and ticket sales were lagging. The Society published a MailChimp bulletin on the concert to its mailing list of over 600 e-addresses. It also posted the concert on the community bulletin board NextDoor, where it drew 781 views. A posting was also placed on Reddit, in the Subreddit Austin Music, where it drew 531 additional views.

An article later in this newsletter outlines the Society's explorations into the Public Domain. Ever since this became an issue in 2012, I have been developing a series of public domain worksheets. These worksheets have been publicized on Reddit a number of times. A recent posting is my all-time number one, with 4611 views. Copies of the worksheets have gone all over the United States and to countries as far away as Australia. All copies are accompanied by information about the Austin Traditional Jazz Society.

A constant theme in Board meetings is how to gain better exposure within the Greater Austin Area. The Society has a lively presence on Instagram with 669 followers. Postings include ATJS concert previews, upcoming jazz documentaries and movies on TV, and observances for music-themed holidays such as International Jazz Day and International Tuba Day.

The Chinese use the same pictogram for danger and opportunity. This season finds the Society at a crossroads. It can quietly sink out of sight, or it can renew itself and continue to promote a really fine form of jazz for years to come. I would greatly prefer the latter, having played and promoted traditional jazz for 56 years. I ask all recipients of this newsletter to ask themselves what the Austin Traditional Jazz Society means to them. What can you do to make the Society better? A good start would be for followers to become members, and for members to use their free passes to increase concert attendance and membership.

We have something of value—a form of jazz which is easily accessible to casual listeners. Like all jazz forms, traditional jazz has its complexities, but at its heart it is just good music which appeals to its listeners. Like many older musical forms, it lies well outside the mainstream and is hard to find on television, radio and the movies. Traditional jazz needs its friends, including the Austin Traditional Jazz Society. Let's build on what the Society has accomplished in its fifty years, and go on to keep this music alive for future generations.

Thanks to our Poster Hosts!

Every month, the Society puts up posters for its concerts. Here are our current poster venues.

Music & Arts Round Rock, TX Cedar Park, TX	Capital Music Center 6101 Burnet Road Austin, TX	Westbank String Shop 6301 Manchaca Road Austin, TX
Strait Music Company North 13945 Research Boulevard Austin, TX	Better Than New Band Repair 1402-C Chisholm Trail Round Rock, TX	Upper Crust Bakery 4508 Burnet Road Austin, TX
Fresh Plus Grocery 2917 West Anderson Lane Austin, TX	Phil's Ice House 13265 North US 183 Austin, TX	

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Nominations for ATJS Board of Directors

The following incumbent Directors have agreed to stand for re-election. Nominations for Director are open as of the publication of this newsletter and will be solicited at the Society business meeting during the September 20 concert. The election of Directors will take place at the business meeting during the October concert. If additional persons are nominated, they will be added to the Board. Persons can be nominated at a meeting or via e-mail at info@atjs.org.

Dave Stoddard	President	Bill Troiano	Director
Don Denzin	Recording Secretary	Dave Bedrich	Director
Nancy-Jane Griffith	Director	Kate McCarthy	Director
Becky Maddox	Director		

The 2026-27 Season

The 2026-27 season will have all events at Ben Hur Shrine Temple, 7811 Rockwood Lane in Austin. Membership dues for the year remain at \$60 for single memberships, \$110 for couples and \$25 for students. It would be most helpful if persons renewing their memberships would do so before the September concert. A version is on the website. Filled applications with checks can be sent to ATJS, P.O. Box 27694, Austin 78755. Memberships can be renewed through PayPal at info@atjs.org. if you fill out all of the PayPal boxes you can dispense with the ATJS application. You can also renew at an ATJS concert.

Sunday, September 20, 2026	Silver Creek Jazz Band
Sunday, October 18, 2026	Violet Crown Serenaders
Sunday, November 22, 2026	Swing Shift of Austin
Sunday, January 17, 2027	Annual ATJS Jam Session
Sunday, March 14, 2027	Dirty River Jazz Band
Sunday, April 11, 2026	The Relevators
Sunday, June 6, 2026	ATJS All-Stars

Now It Can Be Told—the Public Domain and Traditional Jazz by Dave Stoddard

Musical compositions can be registered with one of three performance rights groups—ASCAP, BMI and SESAC. In theory this allows composers to collect royalties for public performances. The situation is quite different for traditional jazz. Most songwriters and lyricists from the 1920s and 1930s are long dead and in many cases so are their families. Royalties collected on their works go straight into the coffers of the rights organizations. Works used to enter the public domain after 75 years, but in the early 1990s Sonny Bono fronted for Disney and other big companies to push through a 20-year extension. That meant that for years the public domain remained frozen at works copyrighted through 1922.

In 2012 Cap City Comedy Club received notice from BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.) that since their license called for canned music at their comedy shows, and they were allowing live concerts (ATJS), the license would be amended at a higher rate. BMI is one of three performance rights organizations, the others being ASCAP and SESAC. The Society protested the BMI action strongly, pointing out that its concerts did not play music registered with BMI. The reply was that the license was configured to cover all music at Cap City.

Cap City was unwilling to take BMI to court, but was nice enough to pay half of the overage for several years. In 2015 SESAC sent a missive to Cap City accusing it of playing its registered tunes and demanding \$2300. It looked for a time that the Society would have to leave Cap City, and face the possibility that it would have to obtain licenses with one or more of the performing rights organizations. However, both situations resolved themselves. SESAC's letter was a mass mailing designed to frighten license holders into paying up. Another recipient took SESAC to court, whereupon they withdrew the mass mailing. Soon thereafter the comedy club chain which controlled Cap City acquired a new canned music vendor which had its own licenses, and the BMI problem faded away.

Problems with the performing rights organizations have not been limited to ATJS and Cap City. Several area restaurants dropped live music rather than pay up. Others have had to acquire licenses and/or pay fines. As a condition of staying at Cap City, the Society agreed to have bands play a public domain first set with some PD numbers thereafter. This caused some problems with musicians who were used to choosing favorite tunes. Two music groups dropped out of the ATJS schedule, and a third was not invited for several years.

It wasn't difficult for bands to assemble one public domain set, but bands which tried to play all public domain songs in public found the selection rather limited. This situation began to resolve on January 1, 2019 when the 1923 tunes entered the public domain. Since then, a new year of tunes has entered the public domain on January 1. At present, all tunes copyrighted through 1930 are available and the 1931s will come in on January 1.

When ATJS resumed operations after the pandemic in the spring of 2022, it did so as a public domain organization. Bands have been required to play only public domain or original songs. As the years have gone by this has gotten easier and easier. The mid to late 1920s were the golden age of traditional jazz, and many popular jazz tunes have become available.

When the trouble with BMI started, I assembled a list of traditional jazz tunes in the public domain. Prior to 2019 it was modest but had enough recognizable tunes to assemble several sets. Several of the last jam sessions at Cap City were entirely public domain. As time has gone on, the public domain worksheets have become quite extensive. The latest 2026 opus lists 986 titles in the alphabetical section. A few of these are duplicates under alternate titles, but it is possible to assemble multiple tune lists of 21-24 songs without repeating any of them. Some of these tunes are obscure, but they can all be found recorded by someone on YouTube.

Assembling the worksheets has been a lengthy research project. A major source is an old, large fakebook (book of lead sheets) that shows copyrights for tunes. It contains 1000 tunes, so I have been through many pages. I have collections of traditional jazz arrangements, most of which show the original copyrights. I have books of sheet music which also show copyrights. Several universities have sheet music collections, and they have been helpful. Stomp Off Records has an online document which traces the origins of tunes appearing on their records and CDs.

I have been able to locate some copyright registries in the U.S. Catalogue of Copyright Entries. These are long searches because most compositions in a given year have no jazz interest. There is a website called PD Info that is a good source, although the site has been slow to update in recent years. When I have a question about a tune's original copyright date, I search the Internet for sheet music which shows the date. EBay often has the original sheet music for sale, and you can access the first page with the copyright.

Finally, some of our local jazz ensembles get into this research and perform obscure vintage music of which I was not aware. This is a rich field and I have learned a lot. Finding the tunes and placing them in the worksheets is a good start. I then have the task of shuffling tunes from one column to another on the Excel worksheets. The worksheets can be read on a monitor or printed as notebook pages.

There are multiple worksheets in the public domain files. A sheet titled PD Jazz Standards contains 225 titles. I advise new users to start with this worksheet, as these titles are most likely to be found in fakebooks in popular use by traditional jazz bands. I have sheets for Bix Beiderbecke and San Francisco tunes. Bix Beiderbecke died in 1931, and his recording career was all but over by 1930. Virtually all of the jazz standards he recorded are in the public domain.

The San Francisco style contains a fairly large body of tunes that were written in the 1940s and after. They will not be available for some years. However, the San Francisco style was an attempt to get back to the roots of jazz, and many tunes often associated with San Francisco bands such as the Yerba Buena Jazz Band and the Turk Murphy Jazz Band are out of copyright, and it's not hard to put together a representative jazz gig from PD material. In fact, I have assembled a sample set list for such a gig. The principal San Francisco-style bands are well recorded and 243 of their titles are in the public domain. There are discographical websites which greatly aid this search.

Swing Tunes covers a wealth of public domain tunes that were later recorded by swing bands and orchestras, popular singers and latter-day pop orchestras such as that of Billy Vaughn. I am now up to 161 of them. This worksheet allows swing-based ensembles to continue gigs in

the face of opposition from one or more of the performance rights organizations. Once again, this process will only get easier as more tunes from the 1930s become available.

I have mentioned the public domain worksheets on the discussion forum Reddit several times, and have received requests for them from many places in the United States and a number of foreign countries. This has been educational, because most foreign countries base the public domain on the life of the composer(s) plus 70 years. In the United States it's the copyright date of individual works. I have created a 70-year rule worksheet for foreign requestors.

My success story was in North Dakota. A swing trio was playing at a bakery, and BMI demanded a license for more per month than the band was making. The bakery owner cancelled the trio, but patrons kept asking where the group was. Eventually a BMI rep admitted that they had no jurisdiction over tunes out of copyright, and the bakery gig was resumed. It's still going on.

Throughout this process, bands appearing on the ATJS stage have been able to play a variety of tunes that have been well-received by their audiences.

A Short History of the Austin Traditional Jazz Society by Dave Stoddard

The Austin Traditional Jazz Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing Central Texas with the best in traditional jazz. The Society has managed to chisel out a niche in the busy Austin music scene, and continually strives to attract new fans to the music.

Beverly Wisdom, one of the founders of the Austin Traditional Jazz Society, passed away on February 23, 2018 at the age of 94. Like many Austonians, she moved to Austin from somewhere else. Beverly was born in Hutchinson, Kansas but grew up in Houston. She married Gene Wisdom in 1947 and the couple moved to Austin in 1952. Gene was an actuarial accountant and Professor of Actuarial Science at the University of Texas. He was not a notable jazz player, but played clarinet and banjo with some enthusiasm.

In 1976 the Wisdoms were part of a group of jazz fans who were attending weekly traditional jazz performances by the John Roberts Jazz Band at the Capitol Oyster Company. At one point the group began asking itself why they didn't form a jazz club, and the Austin Traditional Jazz Society began to take shape. The first concert was held on May 13, 1977 at the Rathskeller of the Municipal Auditorium. It should come as no surprise that the first featured ensemble was the John Roberts Jazz Band.

Gene Wisdom was the first Society president, and was joined on the Steering Committee by Linalice Carey, Kitty Clark, Jim Foster, Tommy Griffith, John and Audrey Huntsberger, Jim Lark, Larmon and Becky Maddox, Jim Moore, Colleen Nelson, Walt Scheffer and Beverly Wisdom. Another early Society contributor was trombonist Frank Mesich, who went on to a notable tenure with the Washington, DC-area Buck Creek Jazz Band. By late 1978 the Society had grown to 141 members and was holding monthly concerts at the Elks Lodge at 700 Dawson Road.

Gene Wisdom made frequent business trips to California, where he attended performances of prominent San Francisco jazz bands whenever possible. Gene was particularly fond of trombonist Turk Murphy. He and Beverly also attended California jazz festivals. Gene got to know many of the musicians, and offered them a place to play if their travels brought them into or near Austin. In its early years, The Society featured out-of-town musicians including Jim Maihack, Tom Bartlett, Norma Teagarden, Connie Jones, Herb Hall, Chet Jager, Jimmy Armstrong and Gene Ramey.

In those days the Society was strictly a Dixieland club. Front lines hewed to the traditional clarinet-trumpet/cornet-trombone pattern, and rhythm instruments were limited to piano, banjo/guitar, string bass/tuba and drums. Outlier jazz instruments such as saxophones and violins were frowned upon.

The rules set forth by the initial contributors stated that the Mouldy Figs of Austin (as they were known initially) would exclude Western Swing from performances, as well as any electrically-amplified instruments. These were strongly-held tenets. During the 2004 ATJS Jam Session, Beverly Wisdom reacted to the appearance of violinist Erik Hokkanen (a first-rate jazz player, by the way) by remarking that during Gene's tenure as president a violinist would not have been allowed.

Gene Wisdom's tenure as Society president lasted until his death in 1994. His successors included Ben Conroy, Budge Mabry, Becky Maddox, Jeff Van Horn, Malcolm Rodman, Tom Straus and yours truly, Dave Stoddard. Perhaps the most notable of these was Malcolm Rodman, a retired small business owner who took over the Society when it had fallen on lean times and helped revive its fortunes through his love of traditional jazz and his business acumen. Malcolm served as President and Treasurer before he and his wife moved on to California.

Over the years, the Society has had many homes, sixteen in all. The longest tenures have been 18 years at Donn's Depot and 14 seasons at Cap City Comedy Club. In the 1990s the ATJS All-Star concerts got started when a Dallas band was hired to play and only reed player Bob Krenkel showed up. The band was filled out around him with local players and a tradition was born. Bob played clarinet and soprano and bass saxophones in most of the All-Star concerts until he began appearing in Society concerts with Ron Fink and the Rowdies in May, 2017.

Another early recruit to the All-Stars was trumpeter Tommy Loy, a great Dallas talent who played the National Anthem as a trumpet solo before Dallas Cowboys football games between 1966 and 1988. Gene Wisdom met him on a Dallas business trip. Other notable All-Stars have included Connie Jones, Jim Maihack, Frank Mesich, Dave Sager, Ed Stoddard, Brian Holland, John Gill, Tom McDermott and a host of fine Austin and San Antonio players, including Erik Hokkanen!

The original emphasis on Dixieland to the exclusion of all else has given way to a more relaxed approach to traditional jazz. I assembled a made-for-ATJS group called the Swinging Strings, and they played several memorable concerts. The Relevators, a small big band playing jazz of the 1920s and 30s, has been a conspicuous success. The Joymakers, a tribute to Texas territory jazz bands led by multi-instrumentalist Colin Hancock, have been a sensation.

The Austin area underwent a renaissance in traditional jazz starting in about 2002. This has led to a much fuller array of talented local bands. This and the spectacular rise in travel costs have curtailed the Society's enthusiasm for special concerts featuring top-name bands from out of town. Since 2000, however, the Society has welcomed some top talent to Austin: the Jim Cullum Jazz Band, Ed Polcer and his New York All-Stars, Hal Smith and his On The Levee Jazz Band, Connie Jones and his Crescent City Jazz Band, Banu Gibson, Tim Laughlin and his New Orleans All-Stars and the piano-flute duo Ivory and Gold.

In 2020 a dark cloud appeared over ATJS, and it has not completely moved on. The COVID-19 pandemic saw much of public life in Austin shut down. The ATJS 2019-20 season ended after the February concert by Tommy Griffith and the New Orleans Jazz Band of Austin. As the pandemic dragged on Cap City Comedy Club closed in August, 2020, ending the Society's run of 14 seasons there. The Society was able to find a suitable replacement location at Ben Hur Shrine Temple, a few miles from Cap City. When concerts resumed in March, 2022, however, it was evident that Society membership had been cut more or less in half. The short 2022 season and the full 2022-23 and 2023-24 season were critical successes, but the Society has a long way to go before it regains the position it held prior to the pandemic. It finished 2025-26 with 67 members.

The Society has managed to survive at a time when traditional jazz societies and festivals are going out of business. Traditional jazz is not mainstream music and may never be that ever again, but as long as it has persistent friends in the Austin Traditional Jazz Society, it will remain alive and well in Austin. I am proud to have been a part of the 50 years of the Austin Traditional Jazz Society. I joined the Board in 2003 and became president in 2013.

Dave Stoddard



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The Society's 50th Anniversary Season!

JOIN NOW... to enjoy and preserve traditional jazz in Austin and Central Texas!

The Austin Traditional Jazz Society's 2026-27 year runs to June 30, 2027. Dues for the season remain at \$60 per person, or \$110 per couple. Student memberships remain at \$25. Membership entitles you to free admission to each of the Society's regular concerts, discounted admission to ATJS special events, and e-mail notifications about jazz events of interest in Central Texas. Each member also receives two free passes which can be used at any regular concert. Please include your email address to receive announcements. You can turn in your application at a concert, mail it to the Society or join through the ATJS website, at www.atjs.org. You can also scan and e-mail the application and pay through PayPal. The PayPal address is info@atjs.org. PLEASE NOTE: Membership cards will be held at Will Call at the concert front desk.

Please print legibly

Name: _____ Spouse/ Partner: _____

Please fill in all spaces so we are sure your information is up-to-date.

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail Address: _____

Musician? What instrument(s) do you play? _____

ANNUAL DUES:

Individual, \$60: _____ Couple, \$110: _____ Student, \$25: _____ \$ _____

Contribution to ATJS Education Outreach Fund: _____ \$ _____

TOTAL (make checks payable to "ATJS"): \$ _____

Please present this application at a concert, or mail it with your check to: Austin Traditional Jazz Society, P. O. Box 27694; Austin, TX, 78755-7694. Applications can also be submitted through PayPal.

Cut here ----- Cut here

Retain for your records:

Membership – Austin Traditional Jazz Society -- 2025–26 \$ _____

Education Outreach contribution \$ _____

Date: _____ Check # _____

ATJS is dedicated to the preservation and performance of traditional jazz in Austin and Central Texas.