

Meet ^{the} Band

our history



Blue Moon Big Band 2003

The year started out in full stride for Blue Moon Big Band. By mid-January, the band had already contracted engagements for every month in 2003, with the exception of November (with nearly 20 performances on the calendar, including three during a seven day stretch at the end of March). On some nights, both Blue Moon and Li'l Bit of Blue were performing in the Baltimore-Washington DC area.

Blue Moon had a busy schedule lined up for Valentines' weekend, but two events were postponed due to what was reported as the biggest snow storm in Baltimore's history. The storm dumped approximately 30 inches of snow on the Maryland-Pennsylvania area. On Saturday, the band had planned to entertain at a benefit dance for Jason Marsheck, the band's original guitarist. Jason had been at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center in Seattle, Washington for the past several months fighting a tough battle against Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia, which had advanced to lymphoid blast crisis. With the event rescheduled twice due to heavy snowfall in the Baltimore and surrounding areas, it was finally re-slotted for February 22. The event would have marked the final performance with the band for trumpet player Randy Van Epps, one of the group's original members. But, with the second rescheduling, Randy was not able to join the band on February 22. Patrick Gleason, an Army Bandsman who had been sitting in with Blue Moon off and on for the past year, stepped in immediately to fill the chair. The event raised approximately \$10,000 for the Marsheck family's medical fund.

On Sunday, February 16, the band had planned to team up with long-time friends the Colgan Brothers Band for a Valentines Weekend Rock & Swing concert at the 800-seat Eichelberger Performing Arts Center in Hanover, PA. Similar to the 2001 event which showcased the two bands together, each group had been scheduled to perform music from its own repertoire and then join forces in the final set for 4-part vocal big band songs, featuring Teresa Leonard and the CBB vocalists (Pat Colgan, Mike Hirsh, Brian Colgan) and then some classic rock from the CBB with 13 horns and the added rhythm section from Blue Moon! With the inclement weather, the event was rescheduled for March 23. The concert was to be the final performance with the band for pianist Dave Witherspoon. Music veteran Mark Cook stepped in to fill the spot in the rhythm section at the concert. Following Witherspoon's departure, pianist Clem Ehoff, who had been performing with the big band and also the smaller ensemble off and on for the past few years, took over the vacant rhythm spot for Blue Moon.

Amidst all the personnel changes, bandleader Rob Leonard began making plans for the group's fourth recording, slated as a two-CD set of Christmas standards as well as special arrangements written exclusively for Blue Moon Big Band. As the band read through charts during the early part of the year, they scheduled studio dates at Sound Works Audio Productions in Hanover, PA (production site of the band's first three CDs), and marked early November for release of the new project.

From June through August, the band conducted a special "winery series" at area Pennsylvania and Maryland vineyards. Even with a season of record rainfall, the band entertained large audiences at sites such as Boordy Vineyards in Hydes, MD and Naylor Wine Cellars in Stewartstown, PA. At some of the events, Blue Moon was joined by friends Pat Colgan and Mike Hirsh for guest vocal tunes of crowd favorites like *"Mack the Knife"*, *"Blue Skies"*, *"Come Fly With Me"*, and *"It's Only a Paper Moon"*, as well as duets with the band's vocalist, Teresa Leonard, including *"Makin' Whoopee,"* *"Unforgettable,"* and songs from the upcoming Christmas recording.

In late September, the band's partner jazz ensemble, Li'l Bit of Blue, made its first appearance at the annual Maryland Wine Festival in Westminster, MD. The group included Andrew Mitroff on sax, Roland Dorsey on bass, Dave Cosby on guitar, Marty Knepp on drums, and guest vocalist Michelle Walker. That same month, trumpet player Bobby List left the big band to pursue other interests. His replacement was Dave Russell, a versatile player from Baltimore who quickly established himself as a key utility player in the section, able to play lead, solo, or whatever was necessary of him.

A busy spring and summer closed out with four wedding receptions during the first two weeks of October and the final recording sessions for Blue Moon Big Band's fourth CD, *"Baby, it's Cold Outside,"* which was released on December 1. Over 500 CDs and cassettes were sold by the end of the year. On December 21, the band performed its "Blue Moon Big Band & Friends: A Swingin' Christmas Celebration" concert to a packed house at the Eichelberger Performing Arts Center in Hanover, PA. Finally, the year wrapped up with a monster New Year's Eve celebration at the newly remodeled Spanish Ballroom in Glen Echo, MD, where the band played to nearly 700 Jitterbug, Lindy Hop, and Swing enthusiasts.

And, last but certainly not least, the band welcomed its newest member of the family at 9:18 PM on New Year's Eve, as Emma Ann Leonard, first child of bandleader Rob Leonard and vocalist Teresa Leonard, entered the world. Weighing in at 7 pounds and 15 ounces and measuring 20 and a quarter inches in length, she came in singing!

In 2003, the band adopted *"Ac-cent-tchu-ate the Positive"* as its closer, and for the first time named an "official" opener - *"Deed I Do."* Both songs featured vocalist Teresa Leonard.

