

Jazz trio energizes Macon music scene



Delphine Kirkland is spicing up the local music scene with her voice and her style. She sings lead vocals for the band Blue Jazz.

Delphine Kirkland and Blue Jazz are finding their voices in Macon

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Delphine Kirkland has been everywhere. Over the past few decades, she's journeyed from her birthplace in South Carolina to spend time in Austin, Seattle, Vancouver, Portland, Stockholm, Mifflintown and Guanajuato. Now that she's settled down in rural North Carolina, she's reminded of the country life she knew as a child and thinks it's funny how life has come full circle. But while her location is familiar, she's still always trying new things when it comes to her music.

While not a lifelong performer, Kirkland was inspired in the early 2000s by the works of Earl Johnson and by her late husband David Kirkland, a recording enthusiast. She got some of her earliest appearances in Mifflintown, Pennsylvania, through the Juniata County Food Pantry's Save Thanksgiving benefit concert and later in collaborations with musicians from the acclaimed indie band The Click Clack Boom, now known as The Walking Shapes. She moved to Franklin in 2017 following her husband's passing to be closer to friends in the area. Thankfully, she felt at home right away.

"I love it here," Kirkland said. "Sometimes I meet people who aren't from here and they're like 'don't you find it kind of odd? I don't feel like I fit in here' and well no, I guess it's because I came at it from a different angle. I met musicians."

Local musicians always attest to the importance of community and Kirkland is no exception. In 2019, she teamed up with Dave Stewart and Scott Crowley to form Blue Jazz, named for the set list of blues and jazz music that sets them apart from the mostly classic rock music that dominates performance venues in Franklin.

Having a band and making a name for themselves quickly paid off when COVID-19 reared its ugly head – with the exception of a canceled New Year's Eve show, Kirkland says that Blue Jazz's schedule has gone pretty unimpeded by the virus.

"We're the house band for Sky Valley Country Club. We play there once a month," Kirkland said. "We got to play pretty much the whole time... we've been blessed."

That sense of community was just as important when it came to getting together a crowd. Kirkland made friends and the band earned fans quickly, so they can always count on a good turnout when they perform at local spots (they're showing up at L'Italiana often now that it's open again). Crowley says that regular shows get an audience more invested in keeping up with the band, and the band is just as committed to them.

"You really get to know the room after awhile," Crowley said. "You get to see a lot of familiar faces and it's a lot of fun."

Stewart also credits their popularity to the rarity of their style. Most of Franklin's more prominent local bands, like The Remnants and The Ram Cats, occupy a similar territory with classic rock, so Blue Jazz has focused on blues, jazz and more recently, soul music.



Press photo/Quintin Ellison

Delphine Kirkland and Dave Stewart recently performed at a memorial service in Franklin, bringing a touch of jazz to the service.

Kirkland had no substantial background with blues and jazz before giving it a try with her new band mates, but she knew soul music through and through. Stewart says she's "a little ball of energy" and wasted no time showing her talent for it, which is clear in the way they can get an audience up and dancing.

"That's what everybody likes to get up and dance to," Stewart said of the band's soul selections. "That's what we like to see most. Everybody having a good time."

Kirkland is happy to be back to her musical roots singing soul music, but she's also got lots of aspirations for what to do next. Blue Jazz wants to expand into bigger gigs and more recording opportunities, which they should be able to find more easily once the pandemic subsides.

Kirkland has children living all over between Sweden and Mexico, so she hopes to play some level of solo music in cities across Europe and the Americas. In a few years' time, she'd like to sing her childhood favorites and new songs no one's ever heard with a song in every genre and a band in every city.

"I'd love to just have a band wherever I go," Kirkland said. "I'd love to be able to go anywhere I want and just play."

For more information on Blue Jazz and to find their performance schedule, go online to www.bluejazznc.com or find them on Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.



Blue Jazz members Dave Stewart, Delphine Kirkland and Scott Crowley.

