

# East meets West for June jazz concert in Rockford

By John Collinge

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Dixieland diplomacy via Leningrad will promote harmonious relations between Russian and American jazz artists June 7 at Rockford's Clock Tower Inn with an exclusive Illinois appearance by the Leningrad Dixieland Jazz Band.

The eight-member Soviet troupe will trade chops in a friendly battle of the bands with a regional all-star group brought together by drummer Johnie Faren, the Clock Tower's music and special events coordinator. The four-hour event begins at 3:30 p.m.; tickets are \$12.50 and \$10.

Rockford is one of only 10 U.S. cities the Soviet band is visiting on a tour that begins May 22 in California at the Sacramento Jazz Festival. The Clock Tower outbid Northwestern University and jazz clubs in Chicago for the only Illinois appearance.

"I heard about the tour through word of mouth and I thought 'My God — what a great opportunity,'" said Faren, who worked seven months to confirm the appearance. "They've never been to the Western Hemisphere before. This is just as much an educational event as a musical event."

Faren says jazz is very popular in Russia and that Soviet bands are almost exclusively influenced by American jazz greats like Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton and Bix Beiderbecke. The Leningrad group plays a 10-song set of mostly traditional Dixieland pieces, adding an ethnic Russian touch with the "Finish Polka" and a medley of Moldavian folk tunes.

One of the band's highlights is the classic "When the Saints Go Marchin' In," complete with phonetically-recited, heavily-accented English lyrics. Singing aside, jazz buffs will hear a distinct difference in the Russian approach to Dixieland versus the American style, Faren notes.

"They are a very traditional Dixieland band — very



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The Leningrad Dixieland Jazz band will make a stop in Rockford during its summer tour of the United States

tight, very tame and very restricted. There's not as much freedom in their style and that may be because they're not as free to express themselves as individuals in the Soviet Union," says Faren, who has a tape recording of the band.

"I see it in the drumming and I see it in the solos. As a band, they work great, but I sense a bit of holding back in their expression."

Faren says his own band might "draw them out a bit." He plans to close the show by combining members of both bands for a sort of "jazz summit" jam session.

"This will be the only time they appear on stage with another band," he says. "I don't think this will

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evolve into a power play on stage; a fight to determine which band is better than the other. It's all for fun.

"I think it will be apparent who's who. And yes, we will want to show them what we can do."

Faren's band will employ Chuck Hedges on clarinet, Jim Beebe and Dave Remington on trombone, Bobby Lewis on trumpet, Joe Johnson on piano, Mike Barnett on bass, John DeFaw on guitar and Faren on drums. Faren says he wouldn't be surprised to hear the Russians criticize his band for being too free-wheeling, just as he might feel their approach is a bit staid.

"They've (the Leningrad band) been together more than 20 years and have a definite signature to their style," he says. "But when we put the two bands together at the end of the evening, we'll see that though we live at opposite ends of the world, music is an international language."

"There is no Cold War in jazz."

The Leningrad Dixieland Band, led by 37-year-old saxophonist Oleg Grigoriyevich Kuvaitsev, has released five record albums on the Soviet state label Melodya. The band is a regular participant on Soviet radio and television programs and has been awarded prizes at the Tallin (Estonia), Prague (Czechoslovakia) and Leningrad jazz festivals.