

Lucky Clark On Music: Downeast Brass and Jay Zoller

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It's that time once more for celebrating the holiday season! True, it is nine days away but when it comes to Christmas music, in my humble opinion, it is never too early. I'm not alone in this opinion either, it seems that there's a former music teacher from Augusta shares similar thoughts. Dwight Tibbetts (trumpet), the founder of and arranger for the Downeast Brass will once more team up with Jay Zoller, organist at the South Parish church, for an afternoon concert at 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 17. The group also features Mark Mumme on tuba, Mike Peterson on trombone, Andrew J. Forster on trumpet and D. Loren Fields on the French horn. From his winter home in Florida, Tibbetts was more than happy to chat about that upcoming performance.

Q: So you're heading back up to Maine soon for a Christmas show?



ON
MUSIC
Lucky Clark

Concert info

Downeast Brass with Jay Zoller

Time: 2 p.m.

Date: Sunday, Dec. 17

Venue: South Parish Congregational Church

Address: 9 Church St., Augusta

Tickets: \$10 adults, \$5 students, free for children 12 and younger.

Phone: 621-3551

Email: [\[email protected\]](#)

Websites: concertsatjewett.com, downeastbrass.com



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Tibbetts: Oh, I've got a bunch of gigs I'm coming up for.

Q: Could we focus on the concert that's part of the Concerts at Jewett series on the 17th?

Tibbetts: Well, I've been retired five years now and I don't think it's been 10 years that we've been doing this show so it's either the ninth or 10th time we've done this in a row. When I started it, it was my intent to have something special for Augusta that would happen every year on the same weekend. They've got one of the best organs in the state right at the South Parish there. It's so magical in that church at Christmastime, it's like you've walked back in time. It's all acoustic, even the organ was made back in 1860-something. It's all real, nothing's synthesized, it's just brass and keys, you know? It's all generated by wind power, if you will. Well, about five years ago UMA got wind of what we were doing and they picked us up, that's

when it started taking off because UMA are experts on advertising so the last three or four concerts have been pretty packed. And I'm just proud of it. It started with me but a lot of people have made it successful, Jay (Zoller) and the church, the guys over the years — it's a great thing.

Q: Now what's this year's program going to be like?

Tibbetts: Well, we actually kept it from last year because we didn't get to do it, we were snowed out. It's traditional Christmas carols, a little bit of everything jazzed and juiced up. Since I've been retired my passion has been brass quintet, this is what I do. I scour the internet for good arrangements and then I put my own in there, too, because I'm doing one or two of my own this year, too. These aren't your run-of-the-mill arrangements, they're difficult, they're challenging and they just wow the audience.

Q: How many arrangements have you done so far?

Tibbetts: I've got it up to 40 or 45 pieces, but the real challenge is finding really good stuff for brass and organ. There's not a lot out there, so it's taken a long time to find good stuff for brass quintet and organ. You have to wade through a lot of junk to get the good stuff, it takes time and perseverance. My wife is so patient with me, I spend days searching for good stuff.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the program for this year?

Tibbetts: It goes like this. We start the concert off with just the quintet upfront, we do about five pieces and one of those is a sing-along, then there is an intermission. We then go up and play the second half with the organ, he'll do two or three solos in between the other brass pieces. It's a strong two-hour concert. It's wonderful, I mean, when you open those pipes up on that organ: wow! When you fill up that church with brass and organ ...

Q: I bet the goosebumps are in high gear.

Tibbetts: Yeah. I get choked up, it's amazing. It's such good stuff, really challenging, head-turning stuff. Great, just great.

Q: Early on you mentioned that you had other shows in addition to the one in Augusta — where else will you be?

Tibbetts: Oh, my goodness, we have four other major concerts. We're doing Wiscasset, they have a downtown festival on the 7th (of December); then on Saturday the 9th we're in Waterville at the Methodist church on Pleasant Street; and then on that Sunday we're in Dresden. The next weekend we're in China at the South China Church on Old Route 3, that's on Friday the 15th, then Saturday's the rehearsal for the South Parish and then Sunday's the 17th and the concert there.

Q: Wow, you are going to be busy.

Tibbetts: Yup, then we play for the troops on the radio down in Westbrook, on Conservative Talk Radio on WLOB. It's the Ray Richardson Show, he broadcasts it overseas, we've been doing that for years, so we're going to be very busy then, too.

Q: How long do you want to keep doing this?

Tibbetts: Oh, forever, are you kidding?! (Laughter)

Q: Well, it was a loaded question, I'll admit. I had a feeling that that would be your response.

Tibbetts: Oh, man, it's what turns my wheels. The best part is that I get to arrange and I get to share it, you know? That's how I learn — you learn by doing, as much as anything — and I've been doing this a long time.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to pass on to the folks reading this article about the Christmas show coming up?

Tibbetts: Come out and experience the passion, that's what it is. I'm passionate about what I do. I've always been so blessed to do this. I'm the luckiest guy in the world to be able to do what I love.

Q: Is there anything that we haven't discussed that you think we should, Dwight, about that concert?

Tibbetts: Just feel the passion, it's great, and what better time than at Christmas to feel the brass and organ soak through you.

Lucky Clark has spent 45 years writing about good music and the people who make it. He can be reached at [\[email protected\]](#) if you have any questions, comments or suggestions.

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