



## Heart of England U3A Stratford-upon-Avon

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

A report on the history of two Interest Groups in the Heart of England U3A.  
U3A Big Band Swing and Jazz Music Appreciation Group.  
U3A All Swing and Jazz Music Appreciation Group (formerly Stratford Swingers)

I joined the Heart of England U3A in 2001. On joining I had offered to be an assistant to anyone who wanted to start up a Big Band Swing and Jazz Music Appreciation Group, but I was “gently” persuaded to become the Group Leader.

Initially six members showed an interest and I arranged a house meeting and put forward my idea of how the Group would progress.

I played an experimental sample program of recorded swing and jazz music, recorded onto a cassette tape, which proved acceptable and after much discussion it was agreed that we would meet once a month, as a group, alternatively meeting each month in each members house. At this time I proposed we used my portable music player (a ghetto blaster really) at each meeting, to give a level playing field when playing the music. It was agreed that I would record the music programme onto a C90 Cassette Tape for each meeting. Also as I have a reasonable vinyl LP, CD and Tape library, I could provide the necessary back-up to compiling programmes if and when required.

So in January 2002 we began a series of successful musical afternoon monthly meetings, with each member giving very enthusiastic support and playing their music programmes to the group. Eventually we attracted more enthusiasts to our group until we found we needed to move to a larger venue.

When chatting to my wife (yes, as a married couple we do talk to each other) she suggested a suitable venue would be The Lounge, at the Methodist Church, Old Town, Stratford upon Avon. Enquiries were made and so we moved as a group to this venue in 2002, meeting monthly, on every fourth Tuesday in the month. My ‘ghetto blaster’ by this time had died of exhaustion, so I personally paid for and purchased a Sony Midi Hi fi System, for the sole use of the group, which proved an admirable music player.

We had by this time developed into a very enthusiastic, very friendly and informal music appreciation group, of ladies and gentlemen. Like Topsy our membership just grew and grew, thanks to the enthusiasm and support of the members of our group, until with a membership list total of 42 members, as Group Leader I was obliged to stop accepting new members, because of space issues. Let’s face it if all the 42 members attended a meeting I would have been ‘stuffed’. But we averaged about 25 to 31 members at various meetings, which was acceptable.

We had two visitors who were U3A members in Australia, come along and listen at one of our meetings. They were very impressed, and I was able to give them enough information on how our group was organised, that they formed a Swing and Jazz Recorded Music Appreciation Group on their return to Australia.

However, over the years we were still receiving enquiries from U3A members wanting to join our group, and I had a waiting list, which continued to grow. So I volunteered to form and run a second Big Band Swing and Jazz Music Appreciation Group.

With the sterling help from our then Chairman Elliot Cave, we visited the U3A's in the local area, to see if we could drum up any additional support for the second group. The interest seemed to be there so on September 2008 I arranged an initial meeting at the Lounge of the Methodist Church.

At this meeting I proposed the same musical format that we used in the first group meetings, and I played a similar sample music programme. This program/format didn't meet with approval from everyone who was present at this meeting, but we did attract enough members for us to be able to run a second group. It was agreed we would meet every fourth Thursday in the month, in the Lounge of The Methodist Church, Stratford upon Avon.

This second group settled on the name for the group as "The Stratford Swingers". Over the years that followed I began to get tired of the "nods and winks and laughter" I was subjected too, whenever the name "Stratford Swingers" was mentioned. So with the approval of the Group, we changed our group name to "All Swing and Jazz Music Appreciation Group".

I continued to organise both groups, meeting every fourth Tuesday and Thursday each month. After having organised and run the first Big Band Swing and Jazz Group for ten years, without my missing a meeting during those ten years, I decided to step down as Group Leader in 2012, and Tony Badham very kindly took over as Group Leader and is successfully continuing to organise and run this group.

I have continued to organise and run the All Swing and Jazz Music Appreciation Group, as the Group Leader, every fourth Thursday each month, from its inception in 2008 and it is continuing on into 2013, with a membership of twenty-two members. This Group is as enthusiastic, friendly and informal as it can be, just as I intended each group to be from the beginning in 2001.

Compiled by Group Leader: Dennis Sully  
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