

A man wearing a black tuxedo, a black bow tie, a white shirt, and a black fedora hat is holding a golden saxophone. He is standing outdoors against a light-colored stone wall. The background shows a paved ground.

SECOND SECTION TO
THE WELLINGTON ADVERTISER

APRIL 2, 2010

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Ernie Kalwa: Hits all the right notes in jazz - and in fly fishing

by David Meyer



ERNIE KALWA, THE MUSIC AND THE RIVER



ERNIE AND THE BIG FISH

ELORA - Ernie Kalwa moves easily through several different worlds - almost as easily as water flows over the rocks and creates its own kind of music in the Grand River.

Kalwa has been living in this area, first in Guelph and now in Elora, since the early 1990s and it's a long way from his growing up days in Peterborough - "smallmouth bass country." He laughs and says in that community, "If you weren't wearing a hockey jacket, you were from Trent University."

His father and grandfather were avid anglers and he started fishing at age 4. In grade 7, he started playing saxophone, and he has carried those two avocations through into his adult life. At the University of Waterloo, Kalwa studied mathematics, with a minor in music. After graduating, he spent a year at Humber College, studying jazz.

After all that studying, he formed his own computer company. His workday job is in computer consulting, and he is able to provide about 90% of his services from home. He has become a Certified Oracle Data Administrator. Oracle is the largest data base company in the world, and the second largest software company. Kalwa provides his services to a number of small municipalities and, as he noted wryly, "That pays for fishing gear and saxophone reeds."

He is known all over North America for his playing. He founded the Royal City Saxophone Quartet in 1991.

For someone with a busy life in three differ-

ent worlds of expertise, Kalwa seems remarkably relaxed. But busy, too. On March 14, for example, his band performed at the Wellington County Museum and Archives for the Gallery Concert Series. It was a sold out and then some event, he said with a smile.

The next Saturday he planned to be working at a booth at the annual Sportsman's Show in Toronto - for Trout Unlimited Canada. He is a member of Friends of the Grand River and Isaac Walton Fly Fishers club, too, and also holds a membership in a private trout club.

With such a busy life, "I'm grateful I did all my practising at university and Humber, because my business life doesn't allow for as much practice," he said of his sax playing.

Kalwa formed the Royal City Saxophone Quartet in 1991 in Guelph. It has since issued four CDs of its work, with one of those published with CBC Records. The group's music has taken it to festivals throughout Canada and the United States. In 1998, it represented Ontario in a July 1 performance for an audience of over 100,000 on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

Kalwa plays baritone and bass saxophone, and he said it was relatively easy to form the band after he got to know the musicians. With his own musical influences of Stan Getz, Zoot Sims and Sonny Stitt ("the guy Charlie Parker handed the keys to the kingdom of bebop to"), Kalwa soon had a regular group of

musicians he could call upon. He has a jazz trio, as well as his quartet, and they will play weddings, anniversaries or such things as Jazz on the Grand or Jazz in the Yard, and they have played at Centre Wellington's July 1 celebrations as well.

"All the musician I use are experienced players," Kalwa said. "I've developed musical

relationships over the years. Some I've played with for 20 years. It's easier to start a band when you've developed relationships with other musicians. I hope to continue to play with other musicians throughout Ontario."

Recording CDs is "a whole production in themselves." To get it right in the studio, Kalwa said the band will probably play three or four sessions of three hours each. Then there is the editing and the post production. The final product is available for sale in Elora at the General Store, Gelatley Music in Waterloo and the Bookshelp, in Guelph, as well as on the internet.

The call of the river

Jazz is not the only siren song heard by Kalwa. The music of the river also pulls on him. That is no surprise for someone who caught his first fish at age 4, but Kalwa, who left angling behind for about 10 years when he went to university, has taken his fishing passion to levels

most people seldom dream about.

"I really got hooked on it when I moved to Elora" in 2001. By then, the Grand River was known all over the world as one of the finest fly fishing rivers anywhere and Kalwa, who had been a spinning reel fisherman, jumped right in with both wader-covered feet. In

"In the river, I do enjoy the music of the river itself ..."

2004, he found himself drawn to the second annual Canadian Fly Fishing Championships, held in Quebec. He took a "six or seven hour drive" to the site even though he had "only been fly fishing for two years. I wanted to improve my fly fishing," he said.

While he was there, there was a call for volunteers, so the newbie at fly fishing ended up being "a controller or judge."

That allowed him to watch some of the best anglers in Canada in action. As well, "Many of them encouraged me to come back as a competitor."

In 2006, Kalwa had a great opportunity. The championships were being held on the Grand and Conestogo Rivers. He formed a team called the Ospreys (as in his musical groups, it was relatively easy because he knew a lot of anglers) - and it didn't win. Still, Kalwa himself finished in ninth place out of about 50 anglers, and his teammate and Fergus resi-

dent Arron Varga finished in fourth place, which they took to be encouraging.

That experience "hooked me even more. That secured me a place in 2007 representing the Canadian team in Finland."

Competing at either of those events means learning quite a few new skills. That includes tying his own flies, which Kalwa has been doing since 2003. He said he now ties his own variations of standard flies and he also "invented some that worked very well."

Last year, Kalwa was selected for the Commonwealth Championship for Team Canada, in Scotland. In that competition he landed the biggest fish, no mean feat when competing against some of the best anglers in the world.

His experience there helped demonstrate just how tough the fishing can be and how much preparation has to be done. One young fellow he fished with was completely unprepared. He had tangled leaders and Kalwa brought in a fish before the guy had made his first cast. Kalwa offered him some sympathy, but in competitive fishing, everything has to go just right for any hope of success. The kid finished 62nd out of 62 competitors, and will probably be ready the next time.

Kalwa said that learning is one of the big things about competitive fishing. Anglers compete for themselves but also as a team. He has made many friendships and has visited people and gone fishing for recreation, and helps show old friends around the

Grand

River.

Meanwhile, he is getting ready for another Canadian Championship in Roblin, Manitoba starting in May.

Kalwa has done saltwater fishing twice and looks forward doing some more, perhaps later this year. His stage presence with the band has also helped him in other ways. A few weeks ago he made a fly fishing presentation in Texas and was supposed to speak for about 35 to 40 minutes.

He talked for two hours and the crowd was 30% bigger than he had been told to expect. They want him back. He noted as he nears retirement (he is only 44) he might like to take to the fishing circuit to talk about fly fishing.

Kalwa said living where he does is fabulous for all of his loves, particularly fishing, with the Grand and Conestogo Rivers very near, and Humber Springs Trout Club about 45 minutes away, not to mention the Big Head, Beaver, Saugeen and Maitland Rivers just a short drive beyond that.

A fly rod and a saxophone might seem to be worlds apart, but Kalwa can reconcile them when he fishes.

"In the river, I do enjoy the music of the river itself. The water rushing around your legs when you're wading, or around the rocks, and the birds singing overhead.

"The serenity of it and the surroundings - it takes you away from your regular city life. It's rejuvenating."

THE ROYAL CITY SAXOPHONE QUARTET (cover and band photo courtesy of Janette Gajic)



ERNIE AND CATFISH

