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INDY JAZZ FEST

THURSDAY'S PERFORMERS

STILL FLYING HIGH

Trumpeter Ferguson remains a consummate bandleader.

Maynard Ferguson

Performing: 8:45 p.m. Thursday,
Indiana Roof Ballroom.

Representing: Montreal, Quebec.

By Jay Harvey

STAFF WRITER

Maynard Ferguson celebrated his 71st birthday last month as he had many others: by playing a concert in a high school.

About once a week in the Canadian-born trumpeter's busy touring schedule, he and his band find themselves wowing the young — some of whom earlier in the day have participated in the band's jazz clinics.

Academic institutions are far more receptive to jazz than they used to be, Ferguson said by phone before performing in Schenectady, N.Y., just two days after his birthday.

"It was a problem for myself," he recalled, "to come to the Montreal Conservatory as a jazz lover and be told: 'Just don't mention jazz while you're in this school.' Now you see so many jazz courses scholastically."

Good foundation

The boy Ferguson developed fast on the trumpet, using a classical background to hone a technique that allows him to solo in the lip-busting upper reaches of the instrument. Father Time doesn't seem to be able to get through to him about this age-defying habit.

He'll play the Indy Jazz Fest on opening day at the Indiana Roof Ballroom, sharing the stage with vocalist Diane Schuur.

He had no trouble enthusing over the double billing: "She is one of the great new jazz singers — well, she's been at it a long time, not as long as I have — and she's great singing with a band like mine."

As a youth, Ferguson hero-worshipped great trumpeters such as Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie. When it came to leading bands, the teen-age Ferguson underwent a baptism by fire, fronting an adult ensemble



Concord Records

PEAK PERFORMER: Maynard Ferguson hit the pop charts with *Gonna Fly Now* (Theme From *Rocky*) in 1977.

ble that opened for major American bands passing through Montreal in the '40s.

"I had no idea how to run a band," he said. "It was great experience, but I wasn't a bandleader in the sense of discipline or running a payroll."

Paid his dues

That knowledge had to wait until he'd matured as a player in U.S. bands, earning a reputation with Boyd Raeburn, Jimmy Dorsey, Charlie Barnet and especially Stan Kenton. After a few years as a studio musician, Ferguson emerged as a leader in 1956 with the Birdland Dream Band. He's been out front, blasting away, ever since.

Though he spends a lot of time in schools and colleges, Ferguson said, he doesn't use the visits for recruit-

ing. And he doesn't need to function as a teacher for the musicians who come through his band, either.

"By the time they get to me," he explained, "they've had good training. I almost forget to say (of a candidate) anymore, 'Can he sight-read?'"

Ferguson dislikes conducting auditions, "so (college) band directors send me tapes of the kids who are good. The most talented player will become nervous in front of someone who's well-known. I'd rather hear them when they're comfortable."

Keeping pace with this parade of talented youngsters makes Ferguson a bit of a health nut.

"I'm a swimmer — I do 100 laps in my pool when I'm home. . . . When I'm teaching, I'm always saying they have to take care of their health in this business."