

# St. Some Sax Times

Volume 213

**In this volume:**  
Jazz in the desert.  
Black Mold & a Sand Storm



A man in a red t-shirt and dark jeans stands in the foreground, seen from the back, with his right hand on his head, looking out over a desert landscape. The landscape features large, layered rock formations in shades of tan and brown. In the middle ground, two cars are parked on a dirt path: a dark SUV with its rear hatch open and a white SUV with its driver-side door open. Two other people are standing near the base of the rock formations in the distance. The sky is clear and blue.

## Paul's Vision

*Paul Soderblom's* idea of our jazz band playing in the **Desert** was inspired by the scene from *Blazing Saddles* where the sheriff happens upon Count Basie and his Orchestra randomly in the middle of the **Desert**.

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**Outdoor  
Concerts  
were not  
“legal” in  
Saudi Arabia  
until a week  
before our  
desert gig.**



**“HEY, WE’RE GONNA PLAY A GIG IN THE DESERT NEXT WEEK, WANNA COME?”**

# Dhahran Big Band Desert Jazz

Paul Soderblom is one of our founding members. He’s been playing trombone in the band for the past six years. This is possibly his final year so he decided to push forth one of his grand ideas. Playing in the desert and filming a video for promotion.

Ian, Paul, and I drove an hour into the desert on a Friday morning ahead of the band. Paul and Rich had scoped out the venue a few weeks before so we had no problem finding it. We set up a brand new generator (for mikes, amps, and speakers) and sat around waiting for

the band members to arrive. We were in a little valley (jebel in Arabic) hidden from the world.

Not too long afterwards, a caravan of 4x4 vehicles and a few cars showed up. I don’t know how the cars made it through the sand, but pretty soon we had a fan base and no band. Everyone started setting up blankets, rugs, and picnics. Pretty awesome!

The video crew showed up a bit later. We had previously recorded our feature song “Sing, Sing, Sing With a Swing” in a studio a few weeks ago. Now it was time to record a video



to go with our recording. The video crew was Saudi. They had a bunch of great equipment including a drone(drones were only legalized in Saudi a week before), multiple DSLRs, mics, and five pots of hot tea to go on a table. Awesome.

This was all Paul's plan and it came together around 2pm. Five cameramen recorded video while we lip-synced playing the song to the studio recording. The crowd was just waiting around like it was a tailgating party, watching the drone pilot hover the drone above Doug's head. Doug is the drummer featured on our song. Playing our main song over and over was very cumbersome, but an hour or so later we took a short break and got ready to play our gig.

The crowd had blossomed to over 150 people. The entire jebel was filled with picnicking

fans, lawn chairs, hoola hoops, and camping gear along the entrance of the valley.

We only had two mics for our singers and a small mixing board for the rhythm section. All of it was running off our little generator. Our sound boomed through the valley even without a major sound system. Jazz was bouncing from rock to rock and everywhere in between. Even the fans way in the back of the valley reported great sound quality!

I didn't stick around to camp overnight with the camping groups. I don't own a single item for overnight in the desert. Instead, I tagged a ride home with Ian and a few others. It was a special day in Saudi Arabian history. A full jazz band played a well attended gig out in the middle of the desert.



# DUST & BLACK MOLD !

Allergy testing was a major part of my life back in the 70's and 80's. Just ask my mom and dad. I was allergic to everything from molds to animal dander to dust. Forward ahead forty years and I am still allergic to a few things. Cats and dogs make my eyes itch. Molds and dust simply screw up my respiratory system.

I've only been in my current apartment for a year and a half. I never expected to have any major problems because the housing crews go in and completely refurbish the housing units between renters.

So how is it that I came back after winter holiday and there is black mold spreading from the ceiling in my kitchen? What? It's coming from the vents? You have GOT to be kidding! I got right on the phone and managed to call the corporate housing number between my classes. Yes, there is an entire segment of the company dedicated to housing all ten thousand of

us on this camp. There's even an "emergency" number.

The operator told me to call after school and wait around for an hour to an hour and a half. Emergencies take precedence over the maintenance requests that may take a month or so.

I went home and called. And waited. And waited. And waited. Nope. Instead of getting mad, I decided to attack the mold. A shopping spree later, I replaced all the filters and used enough bleach to cover up a bloody crime scene. For the next few days, I had a pan of evaporating bleach near the intake valves. Days later, I turned off all the air and flooded the apartment with sweet, chilly, winter air - in the 50's - by opening one window upstairs and one downstairs.

Three days later, while I was at school, the entire region got hit with a sand storm. Every millimeter of my apartment was caked in layers of... DUST.



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# DATED TECHNOLOGY

So you say, "Greg, what's with the photo of the 'dumb phone'?" I just bought it for \$15 at a grocery store. I'd rather have a Motorola V3 Razor, but this will have to do for now.

This is for my local SIM card. I have a Google Phone for my primary online and calling phone because most of my calls are either via Internet Telephony - ie FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp - or a few monthly Long Distance calls at \$0.20/minute. Then, I have another phone that acts as a local internet hotspot with a data SIM. Two smart phones is a lot to carry around.

That leaves my local calls and texts. Rarely do I get a local phone call. Once in a while I am required to answer a two step verification from my local Saudi Bank. It took forever to get local status and get situated with a local, valid SIM so I opted to forego the lengthy process of a postpaid account and just keep getting "topup" cards. A smartphone goes through a LOT of cash on a prepaid SIM. Not a dumbphone. This is perfect. I charge it once a week. Put \$5 on it every month and could care less if it gets lost. It's awesome. If I was a parent, I'd buy one of these dumb phones for my kids! No data plan. No camera. No internet. No worries.