

Jane Gang fiddles with jazzy Western swing sound

BY KATE SCHULTZ

Arts Reporter

Around these parts, the closest you might get to Western music are bad covers of "Achy Breaky Heart" in a few scattered saloons. But a new, exhilarating seven-piece band with a Southern twang and jazzy loops has just about cornered the local market on Western swing. The Jane Gang is described by leader Jane Goldman as "kind of like Glen Miller meets some country fiddler."

"It's a real fresh-sounding band. It's essentially a country band put together with jazz musicians," Goldman said while sitting on the rooftop deck of the Mix-It Studios in Somerville, a former soap factory she helped renovate and turn into an artists coop in 1986. "We're very interested in exploring the jazzier side of western swing."

As individuals, the Jane Gang certainly has the credentials to do both and boasts a circle of been-around-the-block musicians in both country and jazz. Saxophonist Tom Hall frequently tours Europe with Your Neighborhood Sax Quartet; guitarist Malcolm Granger has played both country and jazz and toured with Della Reese and Bob Hope. Drummer Dan MacDonald performs regularly with Didi Stewart and Friends; pianist/vocalist Joe Mulholland is the musical



The Jane Gang, a seven-piece band specializing in Western swing, will perform at the Weld Boathouse Stage from 12:30 to 1:15 pm at the Cambridge River Festival this Saturday, Sept. 11.

Jane Gang jazzes up Western music

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director for Didi Stewart and has his own original sextet. Bob Nieske, (who, incidentally, recently tied the knot with Goldman) has performed and recorded with Jimmy Giuffre 4, George Russell, the Either Orchestra and many other bands. Fiddler Mimi Rabson tours the world and records with the Klezmer Conservatory

Band.

And as for Goldman, well, she's began singing back in her native Dallas, Texas. Although she's performed in area blues and rock bands, she feels her gutsy/honey vocals may be best suited to country music. "In country music, the voice is right up front," she explained. "It's really a very personal

sort of experience with the vocalist and that's a lot of the appeal for me."

Goldman came to New England to study art as an undergraduate at Smith College. In fact, today she makes her living from her artwork and is spending two days a week this fall in Connecticut teaching printmaking at the University of Hartford. Music is something that's a close second to her career and the gregarious nature of playing in a band is the perfect complement to the introspective life of the artist, she said.

Western swing, Goldman recently explained to a Northern ignoramus, was invented in the 1930s and was a merging of rural country music with a Texas fiddle tradition and the Big Band sound. The Jane Gang, which has been around for a year and plays locally, may be the only Boston band that plays it, but there are a few in Western Mass.

According to Goldman, the Jane Gang has been playing its own interpretations of classics such as Tammy Wynette's "Almost Persuaded," songs by Brenda Lee ("Walking After Midnight") and Patsy Cline, but plans to do more original stuff as the members "gel more and more." At the River Festival they plan to play some Delbert McClinton, an Irma Thomas song and, of course, some Western swing.

"If somebody is the 'Achy Breaky' sound," Goldman advised, "they're not going to like the Hank Williams meets McCoy Tyner style."