

ARTS ENTERTAINMENT

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N O R T H P O R T

The sweet sounds of jazz

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NORTHPORT — Trumpeter Sweet Willie Singleton has played with many jazz and pop stars during his career, but he narrowly lost out on chances to play with two of the biggest.

Singleton, who is now based in Grand Rapids and will bring his Gentlemen of Jazz to Northport on Saturday, played with both Duke Ellington's and Count Basie's bands. In each case, it was after the bands' legendary leaders had died.

"I missed Basie and Ellington while they were alive,"

he said.

Singleton had auditioned for Ellington, who chose him to play with the band. He performed from 1975 to '78 under Ellington's son Mercer Ellington. Basie had also heard him and wanted him to fill in for a trumpeter who was temporarily absent, so he did — for six months just after Basie died in 1984.

Singleton, 61, grew up in Baton Rouge, La. He has spent a good deal of time during his adulthood in New Orleans and has played with Lou Rawls, Aretha Franklin and Neil Sedaka, among other big names over the years.

He first learned to play

piano at about age 8, but then switched to trumpet and cornet at 9 after hearing his grandmother play 78-rpm records by Harry James. Singleton enlisted in the U.S. Navy at 17 and was a bugler at Arlington National Cemetery. He was active when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and actually participated in the funeral — not as a musician, but as one of the soldiers in dress uniform lining both sides of the street during the procession to Arlington National Cemetery.

"I was right by the cem-



Sweet Willie will bring his Gentlemen of Jazz quintet to Northport Community Arts Center for one show on Saturday.

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JAZZ

Sweet Willie Singleton to perform Saturday

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etery when Jackie and John-John got out of the limo," he said, noting that it wasn't the famous moment when John Jr. saluted the casket.

Since then, Singleton has played with many pop stars, jazz legends and symphony orchestras. His work as a side man — someone who fills in temporarily for a band member — has had him play with Lena Horne, Sarah Vaughan, Gladys Knight and the Pips and dozens of others.

While working on a bachelor's degree in jazz studies at Southern University in Baton Rouge, he was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant to study with jazz trumpet-master Clark Terry.

"Clark Terry was my mentor," he said. "That's probably how my name got into New York."

Since living in Michigan, he has put together the Gentlemen of Jazz quintet. He also serves as a regular guest trumpeter for the Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra.

"I play the high-note stuff

and the jazz parts," he said.

At Saturday's concert at the Northport Community Arts Center, he expects to present a mixture of jazz standards including Ellington and Basie numbers, along with "What a Wonderful World," first made a hit by Louis Armstrong, songs by Horace

Silver and many others.

Sweet Willie and his Gentlemen of Jazz go on stage at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15, or \$5 for students, and are available through www.northportcac.org. The appearance is sponsored by Northport Point Jazz Buffs. For more information, call 386-5001.