

• THE CITY LIGHTS ORCHESTRA •

IN THE NEWS

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Manor house music

FOR CITY LIGHTS' RICH DANIELS, ANOTHER YEAR OF JAMMIN' AT THE CARDINAL'S PAD

I HAVE NEVER BEEN INVITED to a party at the red-brick mansion that sits imposingly on North Avenue between State Parkway and Astor Street. This is the home of Cardinal Francis George and has been the official home of all of Chicago's Roman Catholic leaders—does it surprise you that there have been only eight?—since it was built in 1885.

Rich Daniels gets invited to many fine houses. He's usually in the company of more musicians than pianist Dean Rolando, with whom he is playing in Osgood's photo at the cardinal's Christmas party. And he appreciates it. "Much like any other respected building in Chicago, you feel a sense of history all around you," he says of the cardinal's house. "This home was used by Franklin Roosevelt as a retreat while he was president, not to mention the fact that Pope John Paul II stayed and prayed here on his Chicago visits. The home screams respect, dignity and history."

Over the past six years, saxophonist Daniels has filled this house (or at least some of its rooms—there are 35 of them) with music at Christmas time.

There is no doubt that when he does so he remembers growing up as the only child of Richard and Virginia Daniels in the Wrightwood neighborhood and attending St. Thomas More Catholic Church. He came to music early, around 10 years old. It was not the rock 'n' roll of the time but rather the big-band sounds of Glenn Miller, Woody Herman, Benny Goodman and others. "My parents used to put me to bed when



I was a baby to big-band records. That sound just became a part of me," he says.

Since his teenage years, Daniels has played in and conducted bands and orchestras. For nearly two decades he has been the leader of the City Lights Orchestra which, in various musical configurations (from a duo to the full 32-member unit), is one of the

area's most in-demand. It plays private and corporate parties, many charity events and sometimes accompanies such performers as Dennis DeYoung. There have been the occasional large public performances—a Grant Park tribute to Frank Sinatra, Taste of Chicago gigs—but the CLO is not famous and never will be.

"And that's OK," says Daniels, whose job entails juggling business and music; he books more than 225 engagements a year. "The satisfaction comes from making a client happy, providing the sort of music that makes the people attending any event or party satisfied and happy."

So, how was the cardinal's Christmas party?

"Everyone, including the cardinal, could not have been nicer to us," Daniels said. "It was terrific and packed with good-spirited guests. It's always a wonderful event. The cardinal personally greets all of the guests, about 250 people, and takes photos with them near his Christmas tree."

Anybody get drunk and act crazy?

There was no answer, leading us to the realization that part of being a band leader is knowing when to be quiet.