



The Northbrook-based Don Cagen Orchestra played for President Barack Obama at the Home States Inaugural Ball the evening of Jan. 20. (From left) President Barack Obama, Becky Cagen, Michelle Obama and Don Cagen.

Don and Becky Cagen's excellent Inaugural adventure

There were dozens of inaugural parties the evening of Jan. 20 in Washington D.C. But there were only 10 official Inaugural Balls, and first among equals was the Home States Ball, co-hosted by Illinois and Hawaii at the Washington Convention Center.

The dance band for that prestigious party was the Northbrook-based Don Cagen Orchestra, and Cagen and his wife Becky still sometimes wonder whether that amazing assignment really took place. "We never could have imagined it," said Becky, who is the ensemble's main vocalist. "Looking back, it almost seems surreal."

Rented a motor coach

But it was. Eighteen people, including Becky and Don, 14 musicians and two staff members, plus band instruments made the 12-hour trip to Washington, D.C. by motor coach, arriving in the nation's capital Sunday

night. "We got five suites at the Hilton Garden Inn two blocks from the White House," Becky continued. "We crammed in as if we were in college."

"Somehow I knew it would happen," said Don Cagen. "When we found out we were under consideration, I went out and bought white tie and tails. I was sure."

Becky also found just the right dress. "I have a lot of formal gowns, as you can imagine," she said, "but I thought I should get a new one for this historic event." Her selection was a floor length amethyst taffeta dress by Ines DiSanto. "She's known as a bridal designer, but she has a wonderful evening collection," she added.

Monday they went to the convention center for a sound check, which was filmed by the CBS affiliate in D.C. They also met the Secret Service, had their pictures taken and were given credentials.

Monday night Cagen and six of his musicians were invited to play jazz at a Chicago-only party at the Mayflower. However, their instruments were at the convention center in a security lock-down. "So we had to rent separate equipment and instruments!" Don said, laughing.

Watched on TV

He and Becky wanted to stay healthy, so Tuesday they watched the Inauguration on television in their hotel room. "But there was such a buzz in the city," he observed. "It was like an open house everywhere — like Mardi Gras on Bourbon Street without the bourbon."

They assembled on the bandstand by 7 p.m. Tuesday night. "We played for three hours," Don said. "For the Obamas' dance we did 'Signed, Sealed, Delivered,' 'At Last,' and a special arrangement of the Beatles song 'Michelle.' That was Becky's idea."

At one point, they had their picture taken with the President and his wife. "They were so lovely," Becky said. "They hugged us just as if we were old friends." After the First Couple left, everything broke loose. "There were 6,500 people at that party," Don said, "and they danced for hours."

The next morning, just before boarding the coach for home, the couple strolled along Pennsylvania Avenue for about 15 minutes. "You could actually feel an energy on that street, underneath your feet," he said.

Once home they found hand-written letters and calls from many of their past clients expressing congratulations. "So many people told us how happy they were that we had been chosen," Becky said. "It was very heart-warming."

And it was yet another confirmation that the Don Cagen Orchestra did indeed play at the Home States Inaugural Ball for President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle the evening of Jan. 20, 2009.

— Dorothy Andries

SRO: PEOPLE TO WATCH IN THE ARTS

Resident Don Cagen's orchestra to play Inaugural

Don Cagen of Northbrook is taking his Don Cagen Orchestra, complete with his vocalist and wife **Becky**, to play at the Inaugural Ball, and not just any of the dozens of parties next week. Their gig is the Presidential Inaugural Home States Ball,

presented by Hawaii and Illinois at the Washington Convention Center in D.C. Tuesday night. "We're not entirely sure how we were chosen," said Cagen, "but several people recommended us and just before Christmas we were asked to send in our credentials

and a live recording." Even before he got the good news Cagen bought himself white tie and tails, but Becky is still looking at gowns from various designers, including **Maria Pinto**, a favorite of **Michelle Obama**. The orchestra will play for a

crowd of 6,500, including **Barack Obama** and his wife, and Cagen promises the repertoire will definitely include **Stevie Wonder's** "Signed, Sealed, Delivered," the couple's personal love song.