

Jazzing it up on campus

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Kansas State University has been receiving national attention over the last few years as a result of its academic achievements. Those successes are measured by first place national debate team championships to the annual bounty of national scholarship award winners.

That winning spirit is now imbued in the KSU sports program. Spearheaded by the football team, the program is experiencing a renaissance that is receiving national attention and gaining respect even though it is begrudgingly bestowed.

The KSU Department of Music, in particular the Jazz Studies program, has made equally impressive progress as evidenced in its first "Purple Blues Festival" and has loftier expectations of becoming an international success story.

This festival was a two-day event presented at All Faiths Chapel that features the students in the program, but also acted as the first public debut for the KSU Faculty Jazz Ensemble. I caught the first of the two evenings and was sorely disappointed I couldn't attend the performances for the second evening. Last year I spoke of lifeless performances and the brevity of the evening's program. The program I observed this first night made me sit up and listen. There have been significant strides made since last year. I think a great deal of the credit can be given to Dennis Wilson, the new KSU Director of Jazz Studies, who is now at the helm.

Tonight was the third and best dose of blues in a remarkable week of music. This evening's performances featured the KSU Lab Band "A", the Jazz Combo #2, and closing the evening was the KSU Faculty Jazz Ensemble. The second evening featured the Concert Jazz Ensemble, Jazz Combo #1, and the Jazz Trombone Quintet. The program was titled as the "Purple Blues Jazz Festival" where the program flyer indicated that "...at some point we hope you hear and enjoy a 'blues so deep

its purple."

Jazz Combo #2 consisted of eight performers kicking off the program with "Sweet" Willie Singleton conducting. This combo meets twice a week to rehearse and perform. They performed the "B' Flat Shuffle", "Cantaloupe Island", and "Impressions." A solid performance that set the tempo for a strong start and an exceptionally strong finish. Mr. Wilson continued his duties as master of ceremonies by stating that future program policy was to feature a student at the concerts who was exhibiting exceptional promise. The combo then became a trio which showcased the promising talent of Robert Roman on piano performing Oscar Peterson's "Weird Blues." His rendition transported me mentally to a much more intimate setting such as atop the Ritz Carlton in Kansas City. There a jazz trio performs regularly and has the intimate climate that I alluded to. Mr. Roman tinkled those ivory keys eliciting a delicate but assured touch that educed sustained applause and cheers.

Dennis Wilson returned once again to introduce Lab Band "A" which he acknowledges is many times a feeder band for the Concert Jazz Band but should not be considered a second place band. Once again Mr. Singleton conducted the group through the following numbers: "Shell Face", "Queen Bee", "Stolen Moments", "Mood Indigo" and "Take The 'A' Train". It was a Count Basie and Duke Ellington tribute. It was immediately evident that the students were enjoying themselves

and felt comfortable with the music which was supplemented by the animated and colorful conducting. Although the conductor did turn into the teacher during the performance of "Stolen Moments" as he had to clap his hands or snap his fingers to maintain the correct tempo, it didn't detract but kept the performance in line. "Mood Indigo," a waltz number, was superbly strong and featured a trumpet solo by Mr. Singleton. It was followed by an impeccably clean "Take The 'A' Train" and once again Robert Roman, the pianist, shone as he worked his magic on the keys.

Mr. Wilson's changes in the jazz studies program which he has the fortitude and vision to label "new traditions," an oxymoron if I ever heard one, not only include featuring promising student musicians, but additional changes include the incorporation of jazz vocalists with the Concert Jazz Ensemble. Also new is a Jazz Trombone Quintet that may grow to a 10-piece Trombone Choir along with ambitious plans to make the festival grow in future years. Among these "new traditions" is the KSU Faculty Jazz Ensemble. This is the most perilous and ambitious enterprise of the new director. The future end state is to have an internationally known ensemble that will travel to and perform at the most prestigious national and international jazz festivals.

This ensemble put it away for the night. The faculty members consisted of Joe Brumbleloe on piano, Michael T. Brown on bass, Dr. Frank Tracz on drums, Willie Singleton on trumpet, and Dennis Wilson on trombone. The set opened with Miles Davis' "Walking" which included both trombone and trumpet solos that featured those individual musicians. The quintet showed what they were capable of and there is a bright promise to their lofty aspirations. The brass walked off to permit the performance of a trio number

and regrouped to perform "Tin Roof Blues" that was the high point of the evening. Talk about wailing the blues. The interchange between Wilson and Singleton as they blew their brass instruments evoking different sounds with their mutes excited the crowd to shout out "Oh, Baby" and "Oh, Yeah."

They then slowed the tempo with a duet performance by Wilson and Brown working the theme of variation of sounds using only trombone and bass to perform "Penales from Heaven." The next number was a special treat featuring Willie Singleton on vocals imitating Louie Armstrong. The final number was "Blue Walk" where a friendly competition between Singleton and Wilson emerged. They challenged themselves to repeat sounds created by the previous individual on his instrument and in the play back repeated and then added a twist. A delightfully playful romp.

This was a high caliber concert all the way around but the seats were half vacant and those that were filled were by the musicians not performing or by their friends or by students that had an assignment to complete. Next opportunity to hear the whole shebang is Nov. 16 at the same place at no cost to you.