

Acalanes & Stanley Jazz Bands are Winners!

By Jean Follmer



Rick Meyer and the Acalanes Jazz Band at the Folsom Jazz Festival

Photo submitted Stan Stinnett

For the second year in a row, the Acalanes High School Jazz Band won 1st place in the AAA division at the Folsom Jazz Festival. Acalanes' Jazz Quintet also won 1st place in their Combo (small groups) Division. The Quintet members are Ellie Athayde, Gurbir Dhillon, Ben Ebert, Parker Grant and Maxime Stinnett.

Acalanes Band Director, Rick Meyer, said the band has gone to the Folsom Jazz Festival for the past five years. He says, "For what it is, it's the best I know of in California. It's an educational program" so it includes workshops the musicians can attend in addition to the competitions. He particularly likes Folsom because his musicians get to listen to the other jazz bands perform. Meyer says "They hear bands they're not going to hear all year."

Meyer has been the Band Director at Acalanes High School for 24 years and oversees three concert bands and the orchestra in addition to the jazz band. Students must audition to become a member of the Acalanes Jazz Band and practice is

every morning at 7:00. Meyer said his "objective is to keep them (the students) involved in music because they're going to be the next proponents of what we do." They are going to be the symphony patrons and the parents that keep music going in the schools. When asked if he likes his job, Rick said "I love my job. You can't do this job and not love it."

Stanley Middle School had a very successful debut at the Folsom Jazz Festival. Led by Director Bob Athayde, the Stanley Jazz Messengers (after Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers) won 3rd place. This was the first competition this band has been in, so the results are even more impressive. In past years, Stanley has participated in numerous other jazz festivals including the Monterey Jazz Festival, Los Medanos Jazz Festival and the local Generations in Jazz Festival. Athayde says he likes the festivals because "they get people excited. Kids remember playing on the Wharf" in Monterey.

The Stanley Jazz Messengers are the

top of the three jazz bands led by Athayde. Jazz is not part of the Stanley curriculum, so students participate on their own time at 7:25 am four days a week. Next year, that commitment will increase to five days a week. Athayde encourages his students to be creative. He says "We stress improvisation with written chord changes and they like doing it. The older we get, the harder it is to do improvised jazz solos." In addition to the jazz bands, Athayde also oversees six concert bands and two after-school combos in conjunction with LASF Assistant Director Tommy Davidson and his Executive Assistant, Ginni Reynolds (who does everything from keeping Athayde on schedule to fixing saxophones).

Both Acalanes and Stanley will perform at the Lafayette Jazz Festival to be held March 6-9, 2008 at the Bentley School Theater in Lafayette. Don't miss it!