

## Acalanes Teens Finish First

By Cathy Tyson



Acalanes Jazz Combo, winner of first place at the Monterey Jazz Festival

Photo provided

Once again the Acalanes High School Jazz Combo reaped the rewards of their many hours of practice with a first place finish last Saturday at the Monterey Jazz Festival's NeXT Generation Youth Jazz Combo Competition. This is a stellar jazz event because of the level of competition from fifty-four groups from four continents.

What's more, Ellie Athayde was honored as the judges' first choice for favorite combo musician of the festival. Gurbir Dhillon was also honored as one of the three additional judges' choices.

"I can't talk now because [sniff] I'm still crying after having listened to the award winning set. Does anybody have a package of tissues I can borrow," said Mo Levich, Director of the Rossmoor Big Band.

As a reward for winning top honors the Combo will play on the main stage at the Monterey Jazz Festival on September 21. This is in addition to the \$750. cash prize they will share. "To win the Monterey Jazz Festival takes hard work, they took years to get here," said Mike Grant, proud father of Parker Grant.

The fourth annual Festival was four days long and had over 80 events in five locations, categories included vocal ensemble, combo, college, high school and middle school big band and conglomerate big band. As expected all of the divisions were highly competitive, judges based their scores on in-

tonation, style and presentation, creativity and solos.

Kudos to Acalanes' winning Combo members Parker Grant, Ben Ebert, Maxime Stinnett, Gurbir Dhillon, and Ellie Athayde.

The Combo has performed together, in various permutations, for five years. The Combo is coached by legendary local jazz musician Mary Fetting. Bob Athayde is their long time mentor, who started with these kids when they were at Stanley. Expect great things from these talented students next year, all of whom are juniors with the exception of Maxime Stinnett who will be going to UC Berkeley in the fall.

In addition, these young musicians have benefitted from Lafayette's Generations in Jazz Foundation as well as from members of the Rossmoor Big Band.

Lamorinda residents are invited to catch the Combo, Generations in Jazz, and other student musicians at the 40th anniversary of Diablo Foods this Friday, April 18th from 3:30 until 6:00. "Our Foundation is appearing to say thank you to Ed Stokes for all he's done for music in the community," said Levich.