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Students Star in Foundation's Jazz Festival

By Cathy Tyson



Left to right: Evan Gruver - Acalanes, Erin Grant - Acalanes, Charley Burt - Rossmoor, Les Peterson - Rossmoor Photo Doug Kohen

This year marks the eleventh Lafayette Jazz Festival, presented by the Generations in Jazz Foundation. Opening night is Thursday, March 10, for Rossmoor residents at their clubhouse; the public is invited to enjoy the show Friday, March 11, through Sunday, March 13, at the Acalanes Performing Arts Center. With bebop, swing, and Dixieland tunes there is bound to be something for everyone. Lafayette is ground zero for jazz appreciation, due in part to the dedicated efforts of the Generations in Jazz Foundation, which has embraced and fostered programs that specifically encourage students.

This year three-time Grammy winner Tom Scott with jazz greats Terry Miller, Andy Eberhard and John Burr, along with local favorites the Stanley Jazz Messengers, will play at the Friday show. Saturday features Erik Jekabson and his Quartet with the Acalanes Jazz Ensemble. Sunday's show includes talented young musicians from across the county playing in the Middle and High School Honor Bands.

The always popular Jazz Festival, the Lafayette Summer Music Jazz Workshop, and the Big Band of Rossmoor's Mentorship Program would not be possible without the generous support of the Generations in Jazz Foundation. It's run entirely by volunteers, and focuses exclusively on supporting community music activities.

"The Foundation was created to preserve jazz education, an original American art form in our community," said Tom Carter, President of the Generations in Jazz Foundation. Life lessons like passion, leadership, innovation and constantly adapting can all be gleaned from music education, according to Carter.

It all started with charismatic Stanley Middle School Music Director Bob Athayde. "We brought the logs to the fire, but he was the fuel. We wanted to capitalize on a great resource," said Carter.

The Lafayette Summer Music Jazz Workshop and the Mentorship Program with the Big Band of Rossmoor are sponsored by the Foundation. Students at the Summer Workshop participate in master classes and improvisation workshops in a close knit environment with other gifted middle school and high school youth. Money raised through the Foundation is funneled back to scholarships for students who otherwise would not be able to attend.

The students in the Mentorship Program truly enjoy working with the seniors in the Big Band. Many of the elder players actually traveled by train from town to town back in the 1940s to play with Big Bands. "It really completed the family," commented Carter about the relationship of young and old players; they happily pass along advice and support the students.

Originally spearheaded by professional musician Mary Fettig, who used to play with the Stan Kenton Orchestra, the Contra Costa County High School Honor Jazz Band is made up of very talented young people from fourteen high schools and fourteen middle schools.

The goal of the upcoming Jazz Festival is simply to bring music to the community and give talented young musicians an opportunity to play. Organizers just want to make enough to break even - that's why tickets are only \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. Tickets are available through the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, 284-7404 or www.lafayettechamber.org.

"Music changed my life," said Carter. He played a trumpet from fifth grade all the way through college. That trumpet collected dust in the closet for fifteen years, "I thought I was done after raising four kids, but I realized how much I missed it. It's kind of like riding a bike." The Generations in Jazz Foundation hopes to share and encourage that passion.

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