

Bands to compete at jazz festival

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Originally published 05:39 p.m., March 21, 2011

Updated 05:40 p.m., March 21, 2011

A headline performance by the California State University, Northridge, Jazz Band with world-renowned trombonist and recording artist Bob McChesney will highlight the 3rd Annual Jazz Festival on March 26 in Newbury Park.

Hosted by Newbury Park High School, the festival is a regional competition for Southern California school bands. The event also offers hands-on clinics and a chance to win a scholarship to the Idyllwild Arts Jazz Summer Camp.

"This jazz festival was a new event that I established a few years ago as a way to help raise funds to support our program," said Dennis Crystal, director of the Instrumental Music Department at Newbury Park High School and executive producer of the annual event. "We are fortunate to have an acoustically outstanding theater, so it seemed very natural for me to build a jazz festival here."

While most community members are probably generally aware of the band programs in their area, they may have never taken the opportunity to see these groups and what they do, Crystal said.

"Each ensemble prepares 20 to 30 minutes worth of repertoire that they perform for a panel of three judges," explained Crystal, further noting that this year's judges are some of the leading jazz educators from around Southern California and even through the Western United States.

Judge David Caffey, director of the School of Music and professor of music at the University of Northern Colorado, said opportunities like this are important because they allow students to meet professional musicians and hear them perform.

"That connection alone can lead to the kind of inspiration and encouragement that might lead a student to pursue a career in music," Caffey said. While he doesn't expect all students to pursue a music career, "it is my hope that many of these student participants will become music fans, specifically jazz fans in this case, as a result of a positive experience in their high school bands."

After their adjudicated performance, the bands will spend 30 minutes with an additional clinician who will rehearse with them and try to immediately improve on what they just performed for the judges.

"While most jazz festivals are primarily concerts," Crystal said, "ours is a unique educational performance opportunity for school bands in which they spend the day in

direct interaction with some great teachers and with other students from other schools who all share the same fundamental goal: be the best that you can."

In addition performances by a variety of bands, the day will feature a noon concert by the CSUN Jazz Band under the direction of Matt Harris.

"It is always good to have a college band perform for high school students to show that the music can sound this professional and the college kids are only a little older than the high school students," Harris said. "The CSUN band also features student compositions and a wide range of musical styles probably never heard by most high school students. The improvisers in the college band are also quite advanced for their age — something not heard of too often at the high school level."

The ultimate goal of the event is to raise money, Crystal further emphasized. "The money raised will help to defray the costs of transportation to competitions, instrument maintenance and repairs, purchasing music for our library, paying for coaches to be able to come and provide direct instruction to individual sections."

The secondary benefit "is to provide my students with access to some great performances and educators for the day," Crystal said.

McChesney, who plays on television shows such as "Family Guy" and "The Simpsons," hopes that his presence and performance with CSUN students "will be exciting and at a high level and therefore inspire the younger players to keep practicing and studying." It is important to have events like this where young musicians in the community with similar interests can express themselves, share their performances and ideas, and also have the opportunity to win scholarships, McChesney added. "People get into music because it is fun – fun to perform and fun to hear other bands and soloists play. Also, having a festival such as this and with guest artists such as myself shows that a career in music is possible."



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