

Cranbrook Jazz Band enlarges audiences with tour

Story and photos:
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Tunbridge Wells and various secondary schools, including Beneden, the school Princess Anne attended.

"We've been working pretty hard," first-year band member and pianist Marcie Szarama said. "I had been playing the classical organ for about 10 years, but when I heard Kristen (Kristen Studabaker, lead guitarist) talking about the jazz band, it sounded like fun and I decided to try it out."

Now, Marcie, a Troy resident, is hooked by jazz. "I like all kinds of music, but I really enjoy playing songs like 'Feels So Good' and the older stuff like 'In the Mood' or 'String of Pearls.' I hope I can learn to play jazz piano well. It's something I'd really like to do."

Her friend Kristen lives in Birmingham with her mother Nina, who is director of the Madrigals, a girls choral group from Kingswood School. The Madrigals will accompany the jazz band on the English tour.

Ms. Studabaker, a 16-year-old Kingswood junior, plays in a rock band called Conquest, besides playing lead guitar in the jazz band. She was swayed by the prospect of going to England when she decided to join the band.

"My mother was talking about going

to England with the Madrigals and my dad is going as a chaperone. I thought if they were going to England, why not me? So, I asked Mr. Halajian for an audition and I made it. Our lead guitarist had graduated last year," she said.

Sixteen-year-old junior Bob Thayer of Huntington Woods is the bass player in the jazz band. This is his second year in the band and he expects to be a music major in college.

"I like the idea of playing a lot of music," he said. "Because of this trip, we've been working harder and learning a lot more music. I really like performing, so I'm looking forward to this trip. I've never been out of the country and I have some relatives in England. Maybe I'll have a chance to see them."

Bob Schwartz of Bloomfield Hills, a 17-year-old senior, comes from a long line of percussionists. His father is a percussionist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and his older brother also is a percussionist.

"When Mr. Halajian joined Cranbrook School, I was in my freshman year, and when he decided to start a jazz band, I decided I'd like to be in it. My brother and I were the two drummers in the jazz band originally," Schwartz said.

"IT WAS MY FIRST time playing a drum set. Before that I was mostly playing classical percussion in concert and symphony bands. As of now, I'd like to continue playing percussion in a jazz band or a symphony orchestra when I go to college."

Schwartz had mixed feelings when he first heard about going to England. "I wasn't quite sure we were good enough. As the group has gone on, I saw how we were really surprising a lot of people. As an ensemble now, we really sound good. That makes me really excited and overwhelmed with the whole excursion."

"If this tour is a success, it must be attributed to Mr. Halajian. He's done one heck of a job with this band."

Sarkis Halajian seems to thrive on being a music educator. His teaching schedule is crowded with instrumental music classes for Cranbrook students.

"In the upper school, I have the concert band for the intermediate students and the symphony band for the top students. That has 51 students in it. Also, I teach in the middle school program, and we have 70 students involved in instrumental music there in the band program. I teach group lessons also and then, there's the jazz band," he said.

FOR BOTH the students and Halajian, the jazz band is an extracurricular activity. He puts it in his busy schedule after school and on weekends.

He also allows time for performing as principal clarinet player in the Warren Symphony Orchestra. He has time, too, for the Cranbrook Winds Quintet. In addition, he has subbed with his clarinet in "nearly every community orchestra in this area."

After completing his master's degree in music performance at Illinois State University, Halajian taught music in

the Boston area before taking over as head of the Cranbrook Music Department in 1975. Soon after he assumed that post he tried to recruit a jazz band.

"The basic problem in starting a jazz band," Halajian said, "is to get the right instrumentation. When we began three years ago, we didn't have a lower brass section, we had no lead trumpet,

no baritone sax players, only two trombones and no lead guitar player.

"Right from the start, it was a problem of drafting students to make sure all the parts were covered. Now, we have the numbers and the jazz band has become very exciting."

AT PRESENT there are 21 students in the jazz band and this includes four girls from Kingswood School.



Sarkis Halajian conducts the student jazz band.

Sarkis Halajian, head of the Cranbrook School Music Department, formed a student jazz band some three years ago, and for the first time the band is getting wider recognition.

"We just played a concert last week for Father's Day at Kingswood School. It was our first public performance this year, and I'd have to say it was very well received," he said.

Next public venture will be an all-school assembly. And then the band will perform in a jazz festival at 8 p.m. Friday in the Cranbrook Performing Arts Center. The festival is a special fund-raiser to help finance the band's English tour.

From March 6-13, the jazz band will give performances in Southeast England as part of a cultural exchange program with Cranbrook, Kent, the school which was the original model for the Cranbrook Educational Community in Bloomfield Hills.

NOT ONLY will the jazz band perform at Cranbrook, Kent, the student musicians also will give concerts at



Mary Bach, lead alto, and the alto sax section practice for Cranbrook Jazz Band concert.

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