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Program Spotlight

Secondary School Jazz Studies Curriculum

■ BY PAUL TYNAN, WITH CARMELLA LUVISOTTO

As an adjudicator at the 2007 Music Fest Canada in Richmond, BC, I heard many fine big bands and small groups. At this year's festival, the Wellington band program sent a total of eighteen groups, most of them in the jazz categories. For their efforts the program received twelve gold and six silver medals. After hearing and clinicing some of Wellington's outstanding ensembles I spoke with the director, Carmella Luvisotto, who informed me that in early 2005 she had successfully applied to the School Board to have Wellington Secondary School, (located in Nanaimo, BC) introduce a Jazz Academy. This led to the formation of one of the few secondary schools jazz studies programs in Canada. Many educators have toyed with the notion of starting a high school jazz studies program. Presented below is one successful model.

History

Prior to 1990, Wellington school was a junior high school (grades 8-10). For 7 years, the program was directed by Bryan Stovell, he was followed by Gerald Taylor for 18 years. In 1990 Wellington became a secondary school and added grades 11 and 12. At the end of the 1995/96 school year Gerald Taylor retired and was replaced by Carmella Luvisotto. In 2005 Wellington implemented the Jazz Academy curriculum and in 2006 Steve Jones joined the faculty part time to team teach the jazz studies course.

Presenting the curriculum

With 205 students currently enrolled in the program, there are currently five big bands, a jazz studies class, and fifteen extra-curricular jazz small groups. In addition to this, there is a junior-level concert band, and a senior-level concert

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band. Two faculty members, Carmella Luvisotto and Steve Jones, staff this program. The extra-curricular jazz small groups are coached after school and during lunch.

The Jazz Academy Program is a course of study for the aspiring jazz musician who wishes to participate in an enriched educational experience of jazz music education. The students are enrolled in Jazz Band 11 or 12, and are also provided the opportunity to take Jazz Studies 11 or 12. These students have a regular academic course load with Jazz Band and Jazz Studies as focus points.

The objective of the Jazz Academy Program is to offer students the opportunity to develop prerequisite skills for jazz improvisation and music performance in an instrumental setting within the academic setting of the school. The program is integrated within the regular school program and is designed to develop the individual and group skills of the participants.

The Jazz Academy Program provides excellence and opportunity for more intensive music education in the area of jazz studies, whether it is in performance, theory, and music recording or music management. The Jazz Academy Program at Wellington Secondary School addresses the academic and musical needs of the students who desire to participate in a jazz studies program.

Overview

The Jazz Academy Program provides two main courses, Jazz Band and Jazz Studies. These classes are available to students entering Grades 11 and 12. Consideration is also given to grade 10 students. The Jazz Band course focuses on jazz ensemble performance skills, including introduction to jazz styles, articulations, basic jazz theory, jazz ear training and jazz improvisation in a large ensemble setting. Basic jazz history is also presented in this course. The Jazz Studies course focuses on jazz improvisation in a jazz small group setting. The curriculum also includes jazz theory and jazz ear training. Students also have the opportunity to explore composition and arranging, concert promotion and management, computer music technology and audio recording skills. To participate in the Jazz Studies Course,

students also must take the Jazz Band course. Past and current projects for the jazz studies class have included publishing music reviews in a local paper, helping with a local college jazz radio show, and managing and promoting a fundraising concert event at a local venue.

Currently only students in grade 10, 11 and 12 can fit the courses into their timetable. The classes are designed so that a student can take the course more than once. The content is varied and the students who have previously taken the course receive more challenging assignments. The facilities consist of two rooms so that two rhythm sections can be utilized with two levels of players during the same class period.

In addition to the core curriculum, the program is supported with master classes, workshops and clinics provided by visiting artists such as Christine Jensen, Ingrid Jensen, Phil Dwyer, Joel Miller's Mandela, and Kirsten Korb.

Goals

To insure a successful and positive experience, the students are placed in an ensemble of musical peers of equal ability and are provided professional musical instruction. The intended outcome of the curriculum is that the students will: 1. Understand, appreciate and perform a wide variety of jazz literature, 2. Be instructed in basic jazz history, 3. Learn to become a proficient sight-reader of music, 4. Become aware of his or her skill level on their instrument in relation to their potential, 5. Learn an amount of music theory related to the proficiency level of improvisation they seek to attain, 6. Be made aware of various careers, employment opportunities and university/college options made available to them, 7. Engage in concerts whenever possible, 8. Have the opportunity to be exposed to guest clinicians, 9. Be encouraged to arrange or compose music, 10. Be exposed to aspects of audio recording, 11. Be exposed to current technology in music notation and accompaniment software, 12. Have the opportunity to plan aspects of concert and promote audience attendance at concerts, 13. Become an independent thinker and self-motivated worker while becoming a team performer and directing or taking part in productive sectional rehearsals, 14. Gain the necessary skills to perform without a conductor

The students enrolled in the Jazz Academy Program will have

the unique opportunity to align academic and musical goals within an integrated and supportive academic environment. These students will be members of a group of individuals committed to academic and musical success and they will receive outstanding instruction in an environment dedicated to success. By committing to the Jazz Academy Program students will enhance their skill and knowledge in the jazz music idiom and produce opportunities to participate in jazz opportunities at the highest possible level during their senior high school years and upon graduation.

Student Jazz Culture

The creation of a jazz culture is an important part of any scene. The students in this program tend to hang and play together. The younger group are involved in “buskin” gigs. This prepares them to perform in more formal situations. The older groups perform regularly, outside of school, for private and corporate functions. Many of the students attend summer jazz program and perform in jazz groups that include members from other schools, and in one case starting a multi-school small group from high school students on Vancouver Island.

Funding

Luisotto states, “District funding for the Wellington music program has not kept up with the growth of the program. Each school year seems to start with budget cuts and dwindling resources from the Nanaimo/Ladysmith school district in concert with diminished funds from the Provincial Government body responsible for public education”.

A familiar situation: Many of the new musical instruments currently listed in their inventory have either been purchased from money raised by students and donations from the school’s Parents Advisory Council, or are currently on loan to us by private individuals and local groups.

In order to combat these issues, a major yearly fund-raising campaign has been undertaken and is broken down into projects.

A Jazz Affair It is an evening of music provided by the ensembles from Wellington School, guest professional artists, and a local jazz band under the direction of Steve Jones and in which Carmella Luisotto plays piano. The Jazz Affair is an annual event open to the community and is produced by the Friends of Nanaimo Jazz Society consisting of current and past Wellington School parents. This is an annual fund-raising event to raise money for music bursaries, clinics and workshops, instruments and equipment. This event provides an opportunity for young student musicians to interact and perform with professional musicians.

Annual JazzFest at the Port Theatre (February) This annual multi-school event raises money to subsidize major band trips such as trips to the Lionel Hampton International Jazz Festival in Moscow, Idaho as well as bursaries. This event includes a matinee performance involving multiple schools at which Wellington School Jazz Academy students perform in front of 800 elementary students many of whom are future Wellington students. This event is produced by the Harbour City Jazz Society consisting of current and past parents of jazz students from three Nanaimo Secondary schools.

Community Waterfront Performances Each summer (July-August), Wellington Jazz Academy students in collaboration with the Nanaimo Port Authority and local business perform two hours every Thursday evening at the Nanaimo’s beautiful Waterfront entertaining local strollers and greeting tourists disembarking from visiting cruise ships and yachts. Any donations that may be received are put towards these students’ band trip expenses. These performances allow small ensembles to meet and practice during the summer break. The program director monitors their attendance and performances throughout the summer.

Other yearly fundraising activities include, an annual Christmas wrap (at a local mall), annual poinsettia sale, magazine subscriptions sales, garage sales, door-to-door chocolate almonds sales, hanging basket sales, and coupon books. All funding raising activities are monitored and managed by the program director.

Knowledge Base

Carmella Luisotto directs Wellington Secondary School Jazz Academy. A product of the Nanaimo high school band program she credits Bryan Stovell, David Strong and Steve Jones as important mentors. As a pianist she has studied with Diana Krall, Pamela Butchart-York and Hugh Fraser, earned a diploma in jazz studies from Malaspina College and a completed Bachelors of Music Education from the University of Victoria.

While engaged as a full-time music teacher during the day, she also performs around Nanaimo as a jazz pianist. She is a regular member of the 10-piece band ‘Decadence’ and plays with mentors Jones and Stovell at local events. Under her direction the Wellington Secondary School has had many young musicians continue their studies at top university music programs in North America while pursuing a career in music. Her honours and awards include the Keith Mann Award for Most Outstanding Band Director in Canada, which she was the recipient in 2004.

Closing

As in learning to successfully perform jazz, the successful teaching of jazz needs a model. The model presented above relies on patience, and hard work (as most do). New programs need directions and sometimes they are not easy to find, hopefully this has been helpful. Good Luck and have fun.

