

University bands at jazz concert

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Mus1104 Concert Review A Night of Jazz with the University Jazz Bands The concert I chose to attend was the University Jazz Bands' Student Ensemble Concert on Wednesday, March 6, 2013. The concert featured two ensembles, both the Virginia Tech Jazz Ensemble and the Jazz Lab Band. At this concert, I was both a perceptive listener due to my knowledge of music and music performance, and a casual listener enjoying my friends performing a great concert. I enjoy my nature of listening because I can appreciate the music on many different levels, and get much more out of the performances than the casual listener.

The concert was entirely jazz music, performing hits by Tommy Wolf, Duke Ellington, Mike Tomaro, and on. The ensembles varied in exact composition, but both contained: alto, tenor, and baritone saxophones; trumpets and trombones; drums, bass, piano, and guitar. A performer of every instrument had a solo and one point or another in the various songs, which provided not only a great chance to hear individual musician's talents, but also a great opportunity to hear how the instrument itself can be used in jazz improvisation and how styles vary from instrument to instrument due to the nature of playing/performing them.

There were nine songs performed at the concert, each with their own unique melody and form, but all following the jazz standards. The first song, "Rosewood," was written by Woody Shaw and was performed by the Jazz Lab Band. The song features a fast presto tempo, fast with engineering and a driving bass line. A quarter of the way through the song, there's a great trumpet solo blaring over a more subdued standard jazz riff, which goes straight into a tenor saxophone solo. The saxophone solo developed nicely

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upon the trumpet solo, both incorporating the first melody with some minor improvisations.

The song had three themes, which were played in an ABACA pattern. The song was generally polyphonic, with one soloist or instrument group playing a melody (theme) while the other instruments provided harmonies. The contrast between the trumpet section's unity and the saxophones' varying parts added depth to the song. The second song was "Dat Dere" was written by Bobby Timmons but arranged by Mark Taylor. In contrast to "Rosewood," this song features a main theme that recurs throughout, with episodes throughout which develop upon the theme before it is repeated in its original form again.

It featured a trombone solo which was unique to hear for me, because most pieces I've heard feature saxophone and trumpets but never a trombone. "Dat Dere" also features the typical saxophone and trumpet solos, however those follow the trombone. The tempo is more relaxed than that of "Rosewood" and is just below an allegro. However, the energy and enthusiasm of the musicians made it lively even though it wasn't fast-paced. The third piece, Sammy Nestico's "Basie, Straight Ahead" also had a unique solo: the piano.

The pianist had been switching between piano and keyboard for the first two songs, and in "Basie, Straight Ahead" finally got his time to shine. The piece emphasizes syncopation like none other, with the melody being one syncopated measure after another. There was great conversation between the saxophones and the trumpets, firing back and forth at each other with their music. The tempo was similar to that of "Dat Dere". Towards the end,

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the drums really emphasize the syncopation by playing on the beat so that you can clearly hear that everyone else is off the beat.

The next song the Jazz Lab Band played was “ C-Jam Blues” by Duke Ellington, a classic jazz piece featuring a distinctive motif that is played over and over again. The theme is then developed upon by a few soloists, taking a simple two measure phrase and turning it into great ditty. The trumpet players make great use of Harmon Wah-wah mutes, keeping in the style of the original song by the Duke. Definitely the most laid back piece with regards to tempo, “ C-Jam Blues” is definitely more bluesy than jazz.

After the blues, the Band went into Tommy Wolf’s “ Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most” which ended up morphing into “ Mercy, Mercy, Mercy” by Josef Zawinul. It opens with a beautiful slow piano solo which is quickly followed by a beautifully flowing saxophone solo. Definitely a song of polyphony to start, the saxophone soloist keeps going while the rest of the band accompanies quietly in the background. As soon as the solo is over though, the song quickly sped up and the background temporarily took over the melody, before the solo began some great improvisation upon the main theme.

After the saxophonist, the drummer takes over for some great rhythmic variations. After a brief intermission, the Jazz Ensemble performed four pieces, which were all more lively, energetic, and engaging than the first half. It was the Jazz Ensemble’s performance that I would recommend to friends, because it was much more enjoyable to watch and listen to than the Jazz Lab Band. Whether it was because of their bigger numbers or just a

difference in personality of the performers, they were so much more energetic.

The Ensemble's first piece was "Max" by John Clayton, which gradually adds instruments in and gives a lot of attention to the saxophones by giving most of the melody and theme to them, unless it is being played by everyone. The trumpets break out their Harmon mutes again, which really does add a great layer of depth to the piece. The tempo was more casual than the other pieces which was a great way to relax into the second half. The next piece was "Lambeau Leap" by Fred Sturm, which quickly crescendos before a duet between the keyboardist and a trumpeter.

Following them was a great guitar solo which was quite enjoyable, due to how great jazz guitar sounds. The theme was recurring, with an ABABA pattern throughout, with the B theme being improvisations upon the theme by soloists. The second to last piece was "Ice Castles" by Marvin Hamlisch, which was an incredible piece and was rich in melody and harmonies. Originally intended to be performed by a trumpet player Dave Detwiler, it was performed instead by the director Jason Crafton due to Mr. Detwiler getting stuck in Washington, D.

C. from weather. The trumpet solos throughout the piece are quite smooth and beautiful, giving the piece a nice calm blues feeling. The piece is almost a concerto due to the nature of the trumpet solo. However, it was a great example of polyphony as the ensemble built underneath him, gradually growing in the number of people playing and in dynamic level, all the while accompanying the main trumpet's theme. The final piece of the concert was

“ Minuano”, which is an intriguing and difficult piece by Pat Metheny and Lyle Mays.

Starting with a swirling almost klezmer melody. The song is led by a saxophone soloist until a trombone player takes over and leads the group. A theme and variation of sorts, the main melody is constantly developed upon by various instrumental parts, the tempo changing as they go, starting from a relaxed andante and quickly working their way up. The trumpets’ final use of the Harmon mute was quite enjoyable; a personal favorite of mine. All in all, it was a great concert, with much to talk about! It gave me a new appreciation for jazz music.