

Jazz It Up

Festival's musicians perform for love, little money

By Steve Cheseborough
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Chandler

She does weddings, bar mitzvahs and brunches. But pianist-bandleader Beth Lederman's real joy is sitting down to play jazz, an improvised music that is difficult to play and even more difficult to sell.

"Sometimes I wonder why I do this," she said. "It's a lot of work and not much money. But the music needs to be played."

Lederman's Latin-jazz group kicks off the eighth annual Chandler Jazz Festival at 5:30 p.m. Saturday at Arrowhead Meadows Park amphitheater, 1475 W. Erie St. (near Alma School Road and Chandler Boulevard).

Also on the bill for the free, city-sponsored concert at the Keith Greco Trio with Delphine Cortez at 7 p.m., Azz Izz at 8:30 p.m., and a fireworks show at 9:30 p.m.

Kathey Beckman-Osenbau, a city spokeswoman, said the annual event started when a TV station suggested it for a series on different kinds of entertainment. The city continued the festival after the series died.

"We think it's a good idea to have a jazz festival in the East Valley," Beckman-Osenbau said.

"We want to have a wide variety of jazz. With these bands you have a real variety, something for everybody's taste."

Music comes naturally to Lederman. She spend much of her childhood in Lederman Music, a chain of Valley stores her family owned from the 1950s to the 1970s (the chain has since been sold and the folded).

"My dad (Larry) also is a good musician," she said.

"He started me on lessons at age 5. I played a lot with Dad at home. And in the stores there were always pianos and organs to play.

"Dad also loves jazz. He had me study under (longtime Valley jazz pianist) Bob Ravenscroft. And I played in my high school and college jazz bands."

Lederman is familiar with various styles of jazz, and even does a "Roots of Jazz" program for schoolchildren, covering the history of the music,



Beth Lederman and her Latin-jazz group will open the eighth annual Chandler Jazz Festival at 5:30 p.m. Saturday at Arrowhead Meadows Park amphitheater.

but her specialty is Latin jazz.

"I grew up listening to Santana," Lederman said, explaining her penchant. "I like the blend of the improvisation of jazz and all the Latin rhythms—cha-cha, salsa, meringue."

The group she will bring to the festival includes Tony Malaby, saxophone; James Kass, trumpet; Mike King, bass; Abel Valentino, timbales; and Tony Valenzuela, congas.

Lederman also is part of an all-woman's jazz group, Sophia, which will play an Oct. 23 concert at Papago Park.

As for the often-lamented problem of the shortage of popular support for jazz, Lederman doesn't expect that to be solved easily.

"It's partly the musicians' fault," she said. "It's hard to play something you really like and still

please your audience." Many musicians fail to walk that line and end up either selling out or playing over the listeners' heads, she said.

"And jazz fans have to go out and support live music, instead of just complaining that there isn't enough around," Lederman said. "Express to bar owners, 'Why don't you get some jazz in here?' Or tell them you really like it if they do."

And the nature of jazz itself will prevent it from every becoming superpopular, she said. Its harmonic structure and prolonged improvisation make it more challenging to listeners. (See accompanying story for suggestions on how to appreciate it.)

"It's harder to understand," she said. "It wouldn't be jazz if everybody like it. Part of it is to be innovative and push the envelope."

Besides music and fireworks, the Chandler Jazz Festival features pony riders and other children's activities, food and beverages for sale, and free swimming. Attendees may bring blankets or low lawn chairs to sit on.

Here's how novices can enjoy jazz

Bandleader-pianist Beth Lederman, one of the performers at Saturday's Chandler Jazz Festival, has these suggestions for how to enjoy jazz, for novices:

Be aware of the many different styles of jazz—Dixieland, big-band, be-bop, jazz-rock, and others. And try listening to all of them "You might like one," Lederman said.

Keep the melody going in your head, as the musicians do. That will help you appreciate how soloists improvise from that melody.

Give the music a chance. Listen to it more than once, on different occasions, live and on recordings. "You'll start to hear the same songs done different ways by different groups or by the same group, and you'll get an idea of what a soloist is doing," Lederman said.

Don't just sit there. Have fun. "Make a little noise, tap your feet, get up and move. The energy you put out feeds the musicians," Lederman said.