

Students feel the rhythm of Jazz del Nuevo Mundo

By Diane Drobka
Contributing writer

Published on Sunday, December 7, 2008

Tapping feet, snapping fingers and smiling faces were signs that students were having fun. Along with that fun, they were learning about rhythms and jazz with The Beth Lederman Quartet during the Gila Valley Arts Council's first school residency program of their 2008–2009 "Season of Delight."

Nearly 800 students and teachers attended one of the two bus-in programs at Eastern Arizona College hosted by the Arts Council in October. Residency co-ordinator LaRee Kempton has received positive response from the schools to these exceptional educational opportunities being provided by the council at a very low cost.

Schools attending the bus-ins included Saf-ford, Bonita, Discovery Plus, Thatcher, Triumphant Learning Center, Fort Thomas, Arizona Virtual Academy, Gila Prep Academy and Safford Adventist, along with home-schooled students and parents. A master class for EAC music students was also held that afternoon.

As the name implies, Jazz del Nuevo Mundo celebrates jazz of the New World. Playing classics from Latin America and jazz from the United States and Brazil while engaging students and teachers in the audience in the performance, The Beth Lederman Quartet brought to life the musicality and excitement of this creative art form.

Pianist and band leader Beth Lederman led the residency activities, first asking the students if they knew the origin of jazz. In the afternoon residency, one hand in the back row immediately flew up and the girl answered, "America," which was the correct answer.

Students learned how jazz developed from a nation's blending of cultures, drawing on rhythms of black slaves, melodies of European immigrants and influences from south of the border, especially Brazil. Modern styles, such as reggae, were added to the mix.

In the jazz world, that mix involves improvisation. Lederman and fellow musicians — Mike Crotty, Dan Tomlinson, and Felix Sainz — then demonstrated that, while improvisation sounds random, it must have a structure.

Lederman asked students to pick a beat by stomping their feet, and drummer Tomlinson

picked up the beat. Next they clapped a rhythm for bassist Sainz to follow. As they added elements to the piece, the students could see how each was different but had to fit into the puzzle for the music to work.

Mike Crotty shared his extensive instrument collection with the audience, explaining the difference between brass and woodwind instruments and some that are "in between." He showed how the larger instruments produced bass notes, while the smaller instruments are higher pitched. Crotty was surrounded by the many instruments that he plays so well — trumpet, flugelhorn, tenor sax, alto sax, soprano sax, flute, alto flute and bass flute — and demonstrated each during the program.

A highlight of the residency for some of the audience was a chance to join the group onstage. A dozen children and one teacher donned masks and beads like those worn at Brazil's Carnival and New Orleans' Mardi Gras. Tambourines and other percussion instruments allowed each student to celebrate the music as they paraded across the stage and into the audience among their classmates.

Copyright © 2008 Eastern Arizona Courier