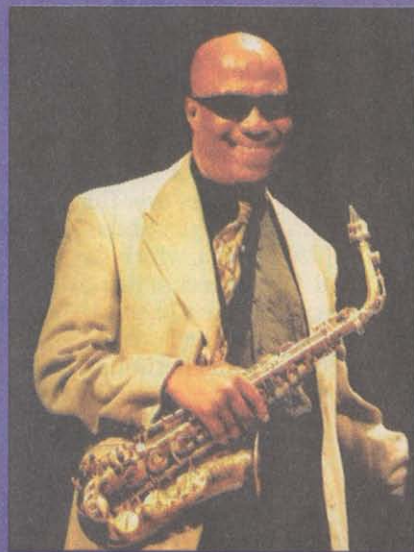


Saxophonist John Handy on ...

Singers: "They don't know music, so they don't know what they're doing ... and (live audiences) have developed such a short attention span, they won't even stop talking to listen."

The temptations of fame: "No drugs. No alcohol. It's simple: Just look at another damn fool, is how I managed not to."



# Handy with a Sax

By **TRICIA JONES**  
*Columbian staff writer*

**H**e's played Carnegie Hall, recorded with Charlie Mingus, earned a Grammy nomination and soloed at the 1965 Monterey Jazz Festival. Alto saxophone is his signature instrument, but he's adept with the tenor sax, saxello, baritone, clarinet and oboe.

Yet John Handy is not above sewing a button onto his custom suits.

"Men my age can shop, can wash, can iron," Handy said, admitting that his wife prefers to shop for groceries. And the couple can afford help around the house.

Still, "I certainly know how to do all those things," Handy said. "I've stayed normal."

Handy's accomplishments have nudged him beyond normal. Clark College staff members were eager to book Handy for a Jan. 29 concert that takes place five days before Handy's 73rd birthday and wraps up Clark's 44th annual jazz festival.

"He's one of those who set the stage for modern jazz in the 1950s and early '60s," said festival organizer

**Competition  
schedule,  
page D4**



One-time Grammy  
nominee plays  
Clark College  
Jazz Festival

Chuck Ramsey. "This group of people, from this time, you can look back and say, 'This is what jazz is about, and what it's supposed to be about.'"

Born in Dallas in 1933, Handy grew up listening to big band, blues and sacred music. He was 15 and ripe for change when the family moved to Oakland, Calif.

"By the time the bebop era started to take shape, my mother was a single parent and didn't understand (the new music) ... I had to find out about that through friends of mine in high school," he recalled.

Handy was no musical novice even then. He first played the recorder at age 11 or 12, and was nearly 13 when he turned to the clarinet. "I

*HANDY, page D4*

## If you go

■ **What:** 44th annual Clark College Jazz Festival, with an added afternoon of saxophonist John Handy in concert.

■ **When:** The festival takes place Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Preliminary competition is 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday (vocal jazz groups) and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday (A and AA-division jazz bands) and Saturday (AAA and AAAA jazz bands). Final competitions are at 7 each evening. John Handy performs

at 3 p.m. Sunday.

■ **Where:** Gaiser Hall, Clark College 1800 E. McLoughlin Blvd., Vancouver.

■ **Cost:** Admission to festival competitions is \$5 per day; children 11 and younger who are accompanied by an adult get in free. Tickets to the John Handy concert are \$15 general, \$10 for Clark College students. Tickets are available at the college bookstore, the music department and at the door.

■ **Information:** Call or 360-992-2662.

# Handy:

From page D1

started playing concert band music right away, but I could always improvise," he said.

Shortly after arriving in Oakland, Handy got his hands on the instrument he really wanted to play — the saxophone. It was a harmonious match.

"I borrowed it on a Wednesday, and I played my first job (with a dance band jazz combo) that Saturday," he said.

Handy was disappointed that he couldn't major in saxophone in college. After earning a degree in clarinet at what is now San Francisco State University, Handy had an obligatory stint in the Army and moved to New York soon afterward.

His talent for improvisation netted Handy an invitation to join jazz bassist Charles Mingus' lineup. But Handy wouldn't stay with the notoriously temperamental bandleader.

"He was just carrying lots of baggage," Handy said of Mingus. "I have to admit I am grateful for what I got from him in terms of a career boost."

Handy's relations with the recording industry were mercurial as well. He had contracts with Roulette Records and Columbia Records.

The latter issued a much-acclaimed recording of Handy's 1965 performance at the Monterey Jazz Festival.

But Handy says record companies offered absurdly low royalties to artists and often defaulted on payment.

"(I refused to deliver) my body, my soul, my talent for free, for virtually nothing," Handy said.

Backing away from record deals helped Handy's mind and spirit, but not his finances. He admits his breaks with the industry cost him name recognition. But he continued teaching at various universities, performing and composing.

Speaking from his home in Oakland, Calif., saxophonist John Handy was by turns reflective, direct, gentle and critical. He also displayed an impish side. He excused himself to ask his wife to turn down the television set, then stage-whispered into the phone, "She's afraid of me."

Here's a sample of Handy's opinions and reminisces.

*On his foray into school sports:*

**"I did boxing and football. When I came to Oakland at 15 (and started playing saxophone) it probably saved me from being hurt or killed."**

*On composing:*

**"I'm lazy. I usually move in two gears: 'slow' and 'stop.'"**

*On the 1965 Monterey Jazz Festival album:*

**"These things can never be perfect. I wish I had played better, but ... you hear so many bad recordings by other people, and they're loved ... I think most of us play on that (type of venue) before we're really mature."**

*On why he stopped teaching:*

**"Young people would come in and say, 'Hey, man.' I'm not 'man.' I'm 'Mr. Handy' to them. ... I love disciplined, respectful people."**

*On racism in America:*

**"It's kept people from developing in many ways, including discoveries and inventions. People haven't gotten the chance to contribute. Then when they do contribute, it's hidden."**

Handy's "Spanish Lady" and "If Only We Knew" earned Grammy nominations for performance and composition. His 1976 crossover hit "Hard Work" was a robust seller. He also has written music for large ensembles, including a concerto for orchestras and jazz soloist(s).

Little remains on Handy's yet-to-achieve list.

## CLARK COLLEGE JAZZ FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

Here's a schedule for the vocal jazz group competitions taking place Thursday at the 44th annual Clark College Jazz Festival. Schools are from Washington state unless otherwise indicated. Schedules for the Friday and Saturday jazz band competitions will appear in Friday's Weekend section.

### "A" competition

- 11 a.m. — Delphian School (Oregon)
- 11:20 a.m. — Washington State School for the Blind
- 11:40 a.m. — King's West School
- Noon — Clark College Vocal Jazz Ensemble
- 1 p.m. — Oregon Episcopal School (Oregon)
- 1:20 p.m. — Announcement of "A" finalists

### "AA" competition

- 1:40 p.m. — Woodland High School
- 2 p.m. — Selah High School
- 2:20 p.m. — Aberdeen High School
- 2:40 p.m. — Cedarcrest High School
- 3 p.m. — Fife High School
- 3:20 p.m. — Announcement of "AA" finalists

### "AAA" competition

- 3:40 p.m. — Prairie High School
- 4 p.m. — Skyview High School
- 4:20 p.m. — Battle Ground High School
- 4:40 p.m. — Camas High School
- 5 p.m. — Announcement of "AAA" finalists
- 7 p.m. — Finals competition
- 8:30 p.m. — Clark College Vocal Jazz Ensemble; announcement of awards

"I don't have things blowing inside that I must do before I pass on," he said. And unlike other artists, Handy isn't snobbish about repetition.

"If I didn't enjoy these things, I wouldn't have done them," he said.

Perhaps that explains his agility with a sewing kit.