Jazz branches out

Top Northwest bands compete at the Clark College Jazz Festival

MOVIES: Mel Gibson plays martyr again in 'Edge of Darkness'
PAGE F4

MUSIC: The Cribs' label hopes big-name guitarist will increase band's profile
PAGE F11

DINING OUT: Harwoods blends Northeast flavor with Northwest flair
PAGE F25
Students show jazz is their forte

High school bands come together to compete and learn

By BRETT OPPEGAARD for The Columbian

The stakes are high at every performance at the Clark College Jazz Festival. That's because 60 ensembles composed of talented high school musicians from throughout Washington and Oregon all are trying to be crowned the 2008 Sweepstakes winner, with just one guaranteed chance to impress.

But the atmosphere at the annual event gets even more intense on the last afternoon, when the biggest schools bring out their best bands to try to earn a shot at the finals.

"I find all three days of the festival extremely exciting," organizer Richard Inouye said. "But on Saturday afternoon, with the 4A schools, the competition just gets out of hand. It just gets unreal."

The festival, which started Thursday and continues through Jan. 30 at the college's Gaiser.

See FESTIVAL, On Page F9

Clark College Jazz Ensemble trombonists Hannah Smith, left, and Grant Carson practice for the Clark College Jazz Festival. The group will play a Count Basie-style swing number, "52 Pickup," and a contemporary rock song, "Michelangelo."
that wake up every few millennia and destroy all organic life. The main character, Shepard, repelled a Reaper attack, but as the dust settled, it was clear the battle was only beginning. “ME2” begins with Shepard’s death, although she’s quickly resurrected by a shadowy group called Cerberus and its cryptic leader, the Illusive Man.

On-planet exploration can be nerve-racking, with sudden firefights breaking out in the most bucolic of settings. But the sometimes confusing violence of the original has given way to tighter, more suspenseful scenarios, and it’s far easier to control the exotic powers — like hacking enemy robots so they attack each other.

A soldier uses bioengineered powers in “Mass Effect 2.”

BioWare has answered other complaints gamers had about 2007’s “Mass Effect,” jettisoning its bewildering inventory system and repetitious planetary missions. If you played that adventure, though, you’ll be delighted by the return of some familiar faces — and you can load your stats and history into the new game.

“Mass Effect” is sophisticated, thought-provoking science fiction that makes “Avatar” look simple-minded. With last year’s “Dragon Age: Origins,” it confirms the BioWare team as the best storytellers in gaming.

Festival:

From Page F3

Hall, typically attracts a standing-room only crowd for the closing of the competition and the final performances, starting at 7 p.m. both Jan. 29 and Jan. 30.

The Sweepstakes Band and the Super Band, composed of the top 18 individual players of the festival, are announced about 9:30 p.m. Jan. 30, followed by an encore performance by the Sweepstakes winner.

Roosevelt High School’s second squad won the 2008 award, with the first team coming back and claiming it again for the Seattle-area school in 2009. Those ensembles will be back and favored to do well, continuing under the direction of Scott Brown. The winner of the festival receives the legacy trophy, a big cup with a trumpet on top that’s passed around from school to school. It also gets invited back the following year for a showcase performance, just before the announcement of the new champion.

In addition, the Clark College Jazz Ensemble will perform at various times during the event, including offering the premiere of “Baked in the Cake,” a contemporary swing piece written specifically for this group by Washington State University Fullman’s coordinator of jazz studies, Greg Yasinski. The college’s band also will play a Count Basie-style swing number, “52 Pickup,” as well as a contemporary rock song dubbed “Michelianzo.”

Jazz ensembles typically have a Count Basie-like collection of horns, usually 15, and a rhythm section that includes a piano, bass and drums. The event attracts about 1,200 high school musicians each year, and about 3,000 supporters, including family, friends and classmates.

A chance to learn

Despite the inherent competitiveness, organizer Inouye said he continues to stress the educational aspects of the festival over the rivalries. That shift in approach refreshed the event in 2009, when it filled all of its performance slots for the first time in several years. This year, Inouye said, he not only staffed the festival slate but even had to turn away another five schools that wanted to participate.

Inouye meanwhile continued expanding his educational and outreach missions by inviting three local middle school bands — Pleasant Valley, Chief Umucum and Alki — to participate in a Jan. 28 clinic. He hopes to offer brief, maybe 15-minute, clinics next year in which judges will give direct feedback and individual instruction to each of the high school bands, too, after they perform. Besides technical refinement, there also is a more ethical element to analyze and adjust.

“Maybe it’s the chemistry among the kids they have in that certain year. Maybe it’s the collection of students that just really play well together,” Inouye said. “What makes this such an exciting competition every year is that so many of the ensembles are so close in abilities. It’s very tight.”

CLARK COLLEGE JAZZ FESTIVAL 2010 SCHEDULE

Jan. 29  
A schools
8 a.m. Ridgefield High School
8:20 a.m. Heritage High School II
8:40 a.m. Trout Lake High School
9 a.m. Ridgefield High School
9:20 a.m. Vancouver School of Arts & Academics
9:40 a.m. Scappoose High School
10 a.m. Battle
10:20 a.m. Douglas High School
10:40 a.m. Columbia High School
11 a.m. Overlake School
11:20 a.m. University Prep
11:40 a.m. Woodland High School
Noon Clark College Jazz Ensemble
1 p.m. Battle Ground High School
1:20 p.m. Hockinson High School
1:40 p.m. Columbia River High School
2 p.m. Nathan Hale High School
2:20 p.m. Northwinds Homeschool
2:40 p.m. Break
3 p.m. Mountain View High School
3:20 p.m. Washougal High School
3:40 p.m. Fife High School
4 p.m. Mt. Spokane High School
4:20 p.m. Mead High School
4:40 p.m. Milwaukee High School
5 p.m. Announcements of A finalists
6 p.m. Announcements of A finalists
7 p.m. Finals competition
9 p.m. Clark College Jazz Ensemble; A and AA awards presentation; Outstanding Musician awards
10:30 p.m. Clark College Jazz Ensemble; A and AA awards presentation
11:40 p.m. Clark College Jazz Ensemble; A and AA awards presentation

Jan. 30  
AAA schools
8 a.m. Hudson’s Bay High School
8:20 a.m. Prairie High School
8:40 a.m. Aloha High School
9 a.m. Shelton High School
9:20 a.m. Cowlitz High School
9:40 a.m. Mt. Spokane High School
10 a.m. Break
10:20 a.m. Hillsboro High School
10:40 a.m. Mountaineer High School
11 a.m. Mountain View High School
11:20 a.m. Roosevelt High School
11:40 a.m. Mead High School
Noon Meadowdale High School
12:20 p.m. Clark College Jazz Ensemble — Richard Inouye; announcement of AAA finalists
12:40 p.m. Clark College Jazz Ensemble
1 p.m. Evergreen High School
1:20 p.m. Union High School
1:40 p.m. Rogers High School
2 p.m. Clackamas High School
2:20 p.m. Kelso High School
2:40 p.m. Puyallup High School
3 p.m. Break
3:20 p.m. Skyview High School
3:40 p.m. Bethel High School
4 p.m. Lake Stevens High School
4:20 p.m. Mountaineer High School
4:40 p.m. Battle Ground High School
5 p.m. Garfield High School
5:20 p.m. Pacific Crest Jazz Orchestra
5:40 p.m. Announcement of AAA finalists
7 p.m. Finals competition
9 p.m. Roosevelt High School Jazz Band
9:40 p.m. 2009 Sweepstakes Band
10:30 p.m. AAA and AAAA awards presentation; 2010 Sweepstakes Award.