

The heat behind the cool



Mountain View High bass player Spencer Stewart, 17, glances back toward his drummer during the band's performance at Clark College. The annual Clark College Jazz Festival draws top-notch bands from across Washington and Oregon to Vancouver.



From left, Battle Ground High School jazz band members Sam Henrikson, Robert Muncaster and Max Wike soak up the music backstage as the Mountain View High Jazz 1 band performs at the Clark College Jazz Festival on Saturday. About 1,200 high school musicians played in the two-day event.

Photos by ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Jazz pumps life into Clark College crowd

By HOWARD BUCK
Columbian staff writer

A smooth wave of cool blew through Vancouver on Saturday.

We're not talking weather. We're talking Ellington, Basie, downbeats, up-tempo and enough black-and-white tuxedo outfits to send Penguin Nation into a frenzy.

Gotta be the annual Clark College Jazz Festival.

This year's 47th edition was, as always, a three-day feast for fans in newly remodeled Gaiser Hall. And, a testing ground for 45 high school jazz bands from Washington and Oregon, both large and small, who played Friday and Saturday following vocal ensemble competition on Thursday.

"Keep positive. Look like you're having fun out there," music teacher Sam Ormson told the Mountain View Jazz I group, the cream of the east Vancouver high school's three stage bands.

A few muted chuckles and warm-up notes leaked from the group as it waited to take the stage. A Seattle-area school was closing out its three-song set.

"They put in so many hours and work so hard," Ormson said during the pause.

"Now's the time they become performers. Put it out there, and communicate that fun they're having to the audience," was his advice to them, he said.

Signs taped to the wall warned

groups, "Be ready! Your 20 minutes begin when the first member goes on stage."

Indeed, only seconds elapsed from the time Mountain View strode in, before it cranked up Ellington's "It's a Mel-low Tone," bathed in bright lights and the warm embrace of a full house.

The group came up big.

Waiting next in the wings, members of Battle Ground High School's top-notch unit grooved and pumped to the set, which ended with Gordon Goodwin's "Count Bubba's Revenge."

The saxophone line, then the trombones, finally the trumpets, belted out staccato verses in a precise surge. Crisp, and clear.

"Great! I think it went great," said lead trumpet player Kameron Wilson, 18, a Mountain View senior. He and the others shared satisfied smiles.

Wilson has played Gaiser Hall before, but not like this. Last year, he played second part. This time, he was lead trumpet, with solos to nail.

"I was just screaming, as loud as I could," he said, laughing. "Oh, God, yeah, there's a lot more pressure. I realize everybody can hear me well.

"It's so hot up there" under the

lights, he added.

Outside the performing hall, other musicians checked out new instruments, sheet music for sale, sign-up sheets for jazz camps.

In Clark's fireplace lounge, four sax players from Clackamas High School jammed on a sax quartet piece laid out on a table: Sight reading, and doing it well.

"This is what we do," said alto sax player Roman Kravets, who turns 18 today. "We're just hanging out until the finals (competitors) are announced." The trip from Oregon to Clark is familiar, being one of the first big local contests each year, he said.

Kravets is impressed by the talent, glad to hear different schools and arrangements. It's a real measuring stick and he's proud of his Clackamas program. "I'm a senior. In four years, we've

improved a lot. It's really looking up," he said.

Rich Inouye, in his second year as Clark jazz director and running the event, said that's the festival's legacy.

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JAZZ DIRECTOR

Jazz:

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"Just soak it up, that's the best thing," he said.

Indeed, hours after she played for Inouye's Clark band, freshman Ashley DeMoss, 18, a trumpet player, loitered with two friends in a mezzanine corner. They listened as Battle Ground played. Inside the hall, young fans ringed the back

wall or sat on the floor, with every folding seat taken.

"It's so much fun. Jazz just has a free-spirit feel to it," DeMoss said. She said the festival helped to lure her to Clark, where she's torn between a music or nursing career. It still gives her chills: "You see soloists who inspire you," she said.

A 2008 Mountain View graduate, DeMoss was thrilled to see her old band thrive under Al Aldridge, a local legend in jazz teaching who's just joined that program. She visited friends there, when they had just picked their new songs.

"They've come such a far way," she said. "They played so well."