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FROM ALLEYS TO ACADEMICS-- BOYD SWINGS IT

By Megan McNamer
Office of University Relations
University of Montana

Wander into any bar, saloon or night club in Montana and, chances are, you won't hear jazz.

But walk through the basement of the music building at the UM and you're likely to hear what sounds amazingly like Count Basie and Chick Corea playing counterpoint to Bach and Mozart.

Jazz has become a viable pursuit at this university largely because of what Lance Boyd and the Jazz Workshop have been doing for the past twelve years.

"When I first started directing the Workshop, jazz was seen as something done in people's garages," Boyd said recently. "We rehearsed one night a week and had an operating budget of \$69. It was an uphill struggle to make it to where we are now."

He always uses "we" when talking about jazz. Director of Jazz Studies at the University of Montana, Boyd says jazz is not a podium-directed kind of art. He says performers can't look to something imposed from outside. They have to call upon things in themselves. It's self-directed.

"Jazz is not so much a step-by-step procedural kind of thing as experiential. Learning comes through performing," he says.

Boyd seeks out opportunities for that to happen. A concert earlier this fall was well-attended. ("We get a mixed audience of university students, babies and people with grey hair.") On Sunday, Dec. 12, a second concert is scheduled

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Alleys to Academics-- add one

at 8 p.m. in the University Theater. Proceeds from that will help send the group to a jazz festival in Colorado.

While Boyd sees performance as jazz's answer to pedagogy, he emphasizes that playing is more than just "feeling it." He says a natural musician who follows intuition should channel it into theory and technique. The other approach is to learn theory and technique until it becomes intuition. Any way it's played, the two have to meet.

"You have to know theory; you have to know your instrument; and you have to come up with ideas-- be creative, artistic. It's quite an involved process."

Boyd says that, nowadays, musicians who rely on intuition alone will fall by the wayside.

"Musicians are coming out of places like North Texas State, Berklee (Conservatory of Music) and getting the jobs. A person can be a phenomenal "jazz" (a street musician who has talent but no formal training) but they'll only be able to play in a certain kind of jazz situation. They won't be competitive. Louis Armstrong, who was an incredible musician, received formal musical training only briefly, in a boys' reformatory. He was featured as a soloist. Today, he'd be handicapped."

Much of contemporary jazz, however, is tied into those earlier jazzers and their effect, Boyd says. His band usually takes arrangements of well-known artists and tries to do them well. Some of their tunes are contemporary and some are original, but the Workshop is not really a forum for the most progressive trends in jazz.

"Groups like Weather Report are built around those performers themselves. Josef Zawinul, Wayne Shorter...they are gigantic musicians and phenomenal people. As individual players we don't yet have that kind of talent."

Over the years, though, the musicians in the group have been getting better, Boyd says. In the past couple years there's been a quantum leap in the band's

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• Alleys to Academics-- add two

abilities. It could be because of better training in the high schools.

"But in Montana we're in a vacuum. Jazz is an urban art. It needs that kind of population to support it."

Boyd got his jazz experience playing clubs in St. Paul and Minneapolis, concurrent with a strictly classical music education at the University of Minnesota. He says even high school kids were getting jazz gigs in those cities.

"But that doesn't happen here. The setting doesn't allow it. The kids here are as musical as anywhere, but they just don't get exposed much to jazz."

Boyd tries to give the Jazz Workshop a glimpse of the professional world. Concerts in the past few years have featured guest soloists Allan Vizzutti (a former student of Boyd's who has made a world name for himself), Bill Watrous, and Dartanyon Brown and Marcia Miget-- who have worked with students at the UM through a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

At the jazz festival in Greeley, Colo., the Workshop will meet with professionals such as Clark Terry, as well as with peer bands. In January, tenor saxophonist Don Menza will play with the group.

Boyd wants his band to keep in touch with what's going on in the jazz world, but also to know the realities of professionalism.

"My advice to students who want a professional career in any kind of music is that they'd better want that more than anything else in the world. It should be in the forefront of their minds. It should be the first thing they think of when they get up in the morning."

When Boyd sees a really outstanding talent become part of his group and then, inevitably, move on ("which is only right"), he admits to feeling a certain sense of compromise in his career.

"I'm not that focused. Things are too important to me-- my family, for one. And now, I wouldn't be competitive. But.. I can have my cake and eat it, too. I can do what I enjoy and be subsidized for it. And, too, there are lots of people

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Alleys to Academics-- add three

out there hitting their heads against a wall. When the business aspect takes over, you can stop enjoying it."

Jazz is only part of Boyd's musical life. He's principal trombonist with the Missoula Symphony, performs with faculty chamber groups, and teaches brass in both classical and jazz idioms.

Now, at the University of Montana, jazz is a fact of life. Maybe, someday, history will reverse itself here-- and jazz will get out in the streets.

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