

Jazz Brings Generations Together at Eastern

By Chris Malmberg

Jazz defies harmony, measure and the sheet music on the stand. As the response to centuries of rigid classical music that came before it, jazz is also mother to the radical genres that arose later on, like rock and rap. But tell a Killers fan that it influenced her favorite band, and she might get angry — good jazz will always polarize. It is not rebellious. It is rebellion made vibration.

That is why students who come to Eastern's jazz camps are already dedicated. Even in middle school, campers are learning to love an art form that demands commitment. These are prospective students, potential alumni. It is not unrealistic to look at a camper in eighth grade and picture him 30 years from now, returning to EWU as an alumnus to play a concert for future music majors. Whatever can be said about it, jazz is a love that's hard to flush from the system.



Peter Solano

Many campers, like 12-year-old Peter Solano from Pasco, Wash., have returned for a second year.

"I listen to basically almost everything," says Solano. He is tall for his age, lanky and a little reserved. When the subject of music comes up, though, he opens up. "When I first soloed, I was so nervous. I'm better now. Not that nervous, anyway."

Solano considers Eastern a destination university for the study of jazz, and he considers jazz to be a central aspect of his future.

"I will come back."

EWU Music Department Professors Rob Tapper and his wife Kristina Ploeger started the Jazz Dialogue Summer Camp in 2001 with 41 high school students. By 2007, camp attendance had jumped to 135 in addition to 45 middle school students who were part of a new, separate camp. The staff-to-camper ratio is excellent, with 20 counselors for the middle school camp and 40 for the high school camp.

"What we offer the kids gets stronger and stronger every year," says Tapper. He and his wife are looking to improve the format for the final parents' concert, and maybe add a reception. Overall, however, the program is "suffering" from excessive vitality.

"We could probably take 10 more high school students," says Tapper. More than that would compromise the one-on-one campers and faculty members appreciate.

The idea for the camp grew out of the annual Jazz Dialogue Festival where alumni, guest musicians and students play together over a three-day period. More than 1,000 people attended in 2006 (five times the turnout of 1999), and 55 schools were involved. Next year, Jazz Dialogue 2008 will also host an Alumni Jazz Reunion (keep your ears open for more information in the coming year).

Even after they've graduated, jazz brings EWU alumni back to their alma mater. No matter where life takes them, the music eventually calls them back. **E**