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Maple performs in 36th Annual North Shore Jazz Fest

by Danielle Perlin

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Maple School band members were all jazzed up for their Jan. 19 performance, in which the junior high musicians took part in the 36th Annual North Shore Jazz Fest at Glenbrook South High School.

The 21 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders in the Maple Junior High School Jazz Band boarded a bus headed toward for the fest, which started at 7:45 a.m. and ended at 6:15 p.m. The jazz band warmed up and played at 8:40 a.m. in front of three judges.

Since 1985, Maple's jazz band has been performing in the Jazz Fest, which had about 80 parent volunteers and more than 100 student volunteers working the event. About 80 bands from about 35 schools came in from all across Illinois to participate in the Jazz Fest; proceeds from the event go to support the GBS band program.

Bands such as the Warren High School Jazz Ensemble, the 2012 Jazz Fest grand champion, as well as the Western Illinois University JSO, featuring jazz musician Chris Vadala, played at this year's Jazz Fest.

The festival is presented by the Glenbrook South Instrumental League, a group of about 200 to 250 band parents who work on new ideas all year long to improve the Jazz Fest annually, said Maureen Basak, president of the league.

"There are four performing centers. ... It's just a great day of jazz," said Jeff Jay, Maple's Jazz Band director.

Jay said his favorite part of Jazz Fest is the learning clinic. Doug Hoffman, who taught band for 34 years in Rockford, Ill., and is now semi-retired, has been teaching clinics and judging at the Jazz Fest for the past 10 to 15 years. He helped the Maple kids for 20 minutes after their performance, making suggestions ranging from dynamics to different swinging.

"All of you guys did a real nice job. Things are going well," Hoffman repeated while making "minor" changes to their technique.

Jay said that while the band is not necessarily going to play "Satin Doll," "My Favorite Things" or "Birdland" again anytime soon, the clinic helps the band "by working on intonation, just all musical things that will apply to the next group of songs that they'll get next week," Jay said.

Jay added that he gives this jazz band new music almost every month.

"They're a pretty decent junior high band, so I like to challenge them," Jay said. "Especially the eighth-graders. ... Those are the kids that love this."

"I think every one of them will play in high school bands. I'm very pleased. The kids, I just let them play. I say do this, do that, and they go home and practice, and they usually come back prepared."

Jay said that parents play a big role in the kids' band participation, too.

"Without [the parents'] involvement, it just doesn't work," Jay said. "Our parents are so supportive."



Maple Jazz Band members (left to right) Jonah Pazol, Avani Ramachandra, Johann Kim, Justin Ji and Katie Cavender play the saxophone at the North Shore Jazz Fest hosted by Glenbrook South on Jan. 19. *photo:Photos by Jill Dunbar/22nd century media.*



Jeff Jay, Maple band director, conducts the members of Maple's Jazz Band at the North Shore Jazz Fest on Jan. 19. (First row, left to right) Jonah Pazol, Avani Ramachandra, Johann Kim, Justin Ji and Katie Cavender. On the piano is Ethan Buttmer. Trombones are played by Rachel Nwia, Luke Cherchenko, Francis Choi, Miranda Nevin and Matt Landaver. *photo:Photos by Jill Dunbar/22nd century media.*

Jay also stated that his biggest challenge to prepare for the Jazz Fest this year was "keeping [the kids] well," because he had numerous kids who were ill for their winter concert.

The kids have jazz band practice at 7:40 a.m. every Friday morning, and regular band is at 7:40 a.m. every other day of the week. Before the Jazz Fest, jazz band practices were every morning at 7:40 a.m. for two weeks straight. And then it was off to classes at 8:30 a.m.

Eighth-grader and alto saxophonist Avani Ramachandra had several solos throughout the three songs that the Maple Jazz Band performed.

"It was scary for [Mr. Jay] to pick me out of everyone. ... When I get a solo, I feel better about myself," said Ramachandra, who stated her favorite piece was "Birdland." "

I've been playing the saxophone for 4 1/2 years now, and I love it so much. It's my baby."

Ramachandra said the people in band are really close with each other.

"We have jazz class [for eighth-graders], then next period is lunch. We eat lunch with Mr. Jay, and we hang out. ... He's amazing, I love him so much. He's like our uncle. He's part of our band family," said Ramachandra, who plans on playing in the high school jazz band. "[Jazz band] is the only class I like in school because it's so fun. It's my life."

Seventh-grader and drummer Isaac Dubofsky has played the drums since he was 5 years old.

"I thought we [performed] really [well] today," said Dubofsky, whose favorite song of the three was "Satin Doll."

When asked about winning, Dubofsky said that the Jazz Fest, right now, is about learning.

"Mr. Jay always tells us it's not about winning when we're in middle school," Dubofsky explained. "It's more about getting better at our instruments and getting ready for the high school level."



Avani Ramachandra, an eighth-grader at Maple School, plays the alto saxophone at the North Shore Jazz Fest during her solo performance. *photo:Photos by Jill Dunbar/22nd century media.*



Kevin Shu, a sixth-grader, plays the piano at the North Shore Jazz Fest. *photo:Photos by Jill Dunbar/22nd century media.*



Matt Landaver, an eighth-grader, plays the tuba with the Maple Jazz Band. *photo:Photos by Jill Dunbar/22nd century media.*