

# JerseyJazz

Journal of the New Jersey Jazz Society

Dedicated to the performance,

promotion and preservation of jazz.

Volume 45 • Issue 6

June 2017



High school jazz musicians participating in the Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival celebrated in support of art programs and arts education nationwide at Jazz at Lincoln Center's United We Swing Parade on May 12, 2017 in Columbus Circle, New York. Photo by Frank Stewart/JALC.

## GOT JAZZ? FOR THESE KIDS IT'S JUST ESSENTIAL!

On May 12 over 400 high school jazz students, Wynton Marsalis, members of the JALC Orchestra, parents and supporters gathered together at Columbus Circle Park in support of arts education nationwide. Their #UnitedWeSwing Second Line parade kicked off the 22nd annual

**ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival** — the largest gathering of high school age jazz musicians in America.

Newark Academy has its best finish at Essentially Ellington national competition

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## UNITED WE SWING!

Essentially Ellington Festival showcases top U.S. high school jazz musicians ... and pitches for school arts funding

At a time when a new administration in Washington has proposed to eliminate public funding for the NEA, this year's Essentially Ellington Festival at Lincoln Center kicked off with a N'Orleans-style Second Line parade to beat the drum for support for the arts.

The event began with brief remarks from Jazz at Lincoln Center's Vice President of Education Todd Stoll, before the parade was kicked off with a trumpet call. JALC Orchestra musicians and students then proceeded to play "Joe Avery's Blues" in a parade from Columbus Circle Park to the Jazz at Lincoln Center marquee.

The parade, while honoring the students and band directors competing in the 22nd annual Essentially Ellington Competition & Festival, also sought to showcase how arts education programs empower young people to learn, create and play. Amidst proposed cuts to arts programs nationwide, the Second Line demonstrated both the importance of preserving the arts as well as the need to protect the next generation's access to arts education, organizers said.

"Decisions are made by the community. If a community can understand the value of knowing who we are and coming to a collective understanding and general wisdom, then great arts will happen," said Wynton Marsalis, Managing and Artistic Director for Jazz at Lincoln Center. "[The budget] is already too small, we shouldn't be thinking about cutting it, we should be thinking about growing it."

### RETURNING WINNER, TUCSON JAZZ INSTITUTE, TAKES HOME FIRST PLACE HONORS, FOR THE THIRD TIME

Over the next three days more than 400 top-flight young jazz players from around the country underscored Marsalis's point with a spirited three-part musical competition and a final concert and awards ceremony at JALC's Frederick P. Rose Hall.

The 1st-place winner was Tucson Jazz Institute from Tucson, AZ. This is the third time TJI has taken 1st-place honors including 2013 and 2014. The 2nd-place winner was Denver School of the Arts from Denver, CO and 3rd-place winner was Dillard Center for the Arts from Fort Lauderdale, FL. In addition, Newark Academy from Livingston, NJ received an honorable mention.

Beginning on May 11, the top 15 high school jazz bands in the country participated in the the competition and for the first time ever, Essentially Ellington welcomed guests from the Orquesta



High school jazz musicians participating in the 22nd Essentially Ellington High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival performed "Joe Avery's Blue" and "When The Saints Go Marching In" at Jazz at Lincoln Center's United We Swing Parade on May 12 in Columbus Circle, New York. Photo by Frank Stewart/JALC.

Juvenil de Jazz de Cuba to perform in exhibition. Their performance expands JALC's outreach to the educational system in Havana. All 16 bands were immersed in three days of mentoring, jam sessions and workshops.

Saturday evening the competition culminated with each top-placing band performing alongside their choice of JALC guest soloist. The final concert also featured the world-renowned orchestra, whose members served as mentors for the finalist bands throughout the festival, led by Wynton Marsalis. The Orchestra performed the music of Chick Webb and Duke Ellington that will be featured in next year's Essentially Ellington program.

Each finalist band was selected by a panel that included Loren Schoenberg, Mark Buselli, Steve Fidyk and Todd Coolman. At the Festival, finalist bands were critiqued by a panel of judges comprised of distinguished jazz musicians and historians: Jazz at Lincoln Center's Managing and Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis; acclaimed trumpeter and Artistic Director of the Pittsburgh and Cleveland Jazz Orchestras Sean Jones; big band leader, drummer and Grammy-nominated recording artist Jeff Hamilton; renowned flautist, saxophonist, composer, educator, and EE Alum Erica von Kleist; and Director Emeritus of Jazz Studies, Houston's High School for Performing and Visual Arts, Dr. Bob Morgan.

Marsalis presented awards to each finalist. Tucson Jazz Institute received the 1st-place trophy and a \$5,000 award. Denver School of the Arts received the 2nd-place trophy and a \$2,500 award. Dillard Center for the Arts received the 3rd-place trophy and a \$1,000 award. The remaining finalists received a prize of \$500. Monetary awards will support the jazz education programs of each of the festival high schools.



## Newark Academy Movin' On Up at Essentially Ellington

The Newark Academy's Chameleon is one of New Jersey's top high school jazz bands. The Livingston school is the reigning New Jersey Association for Jazz Education Festival Division III winner, a spot they've held for eight years in a row. They're also one of the top outfits nationally, as witnessed by their strong showing (11 group and individual awards) last month at the prestigious Essentially Ellington competition at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

Jersey Jazz's Sanford Josephson caught up with Newark Academy's jazz director Julius Tolentino for a brief email interview just after the band received its Honorary Mention award at JALC.

**SJ:** How many years has the band been a finalist?

**JT:** This is the third year Newark Academy has made Essentially Ellington. We also made it in 2012 and 2015. We have been applying every year for the festival since 2009.

**SJ:** How do you feel about receiving Honorable Mention this year?

**JT:** The students and I were very happy about coming in fourth in the nation this year. It's the best our group has placed, and the top three bands this year were either performing arts high schools or all-star high school bands. We are by far the smallest school participating, so this speaks volumes about the work we are doing at Newark Academy. We also received two section awards and eight soloist awards as well.

**SJ:** How are you able to maintain this level of excellence year to year?

**JT:** I think there are three main reasons we can maintain a high level from year to year. First, to get a band to Ellington consistently you have to build a culture around listening to the music, which our students do because



The members of Newark Academy's Chameleon pose in front of Jazz at Lincoln Center before competing at Essentially Ellington for the third time since 2012. Photo by Vee Popat.

they love it, not because they have to. Second is the ability to identify talent at a middle school level and expose them early. Our student body is a little more than 550 students from 6th to 12th grade, so we don't have a large pool of students to pull from, instead we get them exposed to jazz at an early age. We have two auditioned big bands, and the second band can be a place for that young talent to get the training to be in our top group. The third factor is when something is successful, everyone wants to be a part of it. Our group has been recognized nationally for their playing and it has come in 1st place at NJAJE States for eight years in a row. There is a lot of pride in that, which transfers to a tradition of hard work. In comparison to other top programs, we don't have that much rehearsal time, but we make up for that with very focused rehearsals and lots of individual work.

**SJ:** Are any of your band members planning to go on to pursue jazz studies at the college level?

**JT:** We have had a handful of students go into music and jazz studies, and most that do, end up as a double major. I've seen almost all of my students in the top band

continue to play jazz in or outside of their college experience.

**SJ:** Anything else you'd like to add?

**JT:** Wynton Marsalis and the staff at JALC are providing such an experience for all the communities that make it into the festival, and are also providing free music to thousands of schools each year. This festival has been a program changer for Newark Academy and I would encourage more directors to take advantage of these resources. Newark Academy also hosts a non-competitive Regional Essentially Ellington Festival in late April each year, which gives an opportunity for

high school bands to perform Duke Ellington's music and take part in several clinics and workshops all about jazz. Another effort to encourage and teach other communities about jazz music is our Newark Academy Summer Jazz Workshop. It's a two-week program, that has an amazing staff with world class musicians. As the jazz director at Newark Academy, I want to show my students that jazz music is about community and not competition, so I try to lead by example with sharing what we do at NA to anyone that is interested.

■ Newark Academy, founded in 1774, is the second-oldest independent day school in New Jersey with 550 students from 6th to 12th grade. Its jazz big band, "Chameleon," is one of a dozen instrumental groups and one of two select jazz bands. The band has been involved in state and national competitions, placing 1st in the New Jersey state jazz band competition the last eight years. Both combo and big band have also been finalists in the Mingus Competition, the big band coming in first in 2014 and 2015. Members of the big band are also involved in auditioned groups such as Jazz House Kids, Jazz for Teens, Jazz Regions, Jazz All States, Next Generation Jazz Orchestra and the Grammy Session Band. 