Mike Tracy Jazz Ensemble

Educational Concerts

For more than thirty years, the Mike Tracy Jazz Ensemble has been actively involved in offering diverse musical experiences for students of all ages. While based in the Louisville, Kentucky area, the ensemble has presented demonstration concerts in Argentina, Australia, Belize, Brazil, China, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Japan, Poland, New Zealand, Russia, Scotland, Singapore and Wales as well as throughout the United States, reaching thousands of students each year. The Mike Tracy Jazz Ensemble is committed to helping open the world of music through art of improvisation to all interested individuals.

All presentations are tailored to the needs and ages of the audience and will focus upon the basic music concepts of melody, harmony, and rhythm. A musical and cultural historical perspective is also a major part of all presentation. Presentations range in length from 40 minutes to one hour. Extended and repeated presentations are possible. All presentations include group and individual performance, discussion through examples, a question and answer period, and the collaborative creation of a musical piece.

The art of improvisation through the performance of America's own original music, jazz, is the primary thrust of each offering. The group will demonstrate how improvisation is part of everyone's life by comparing the creation of music to language, science, and day-to-day communication. The group will demonstrate how unspoken communication is a vital element of group improvisation and interaction. One tune will be dissected to demonstrate the specific role and function of each individual performer. During this segment various instrumental combinations will be used to show how melody, harmony, and rhythm combine through improvisation to form a jazz piece. Finally, students will be encouraged to assist in the creation of an improvised work by setting parameters and subject matter.

Students will be introduced to the history of America and American music by performing works of different styles. Selections will include examples from dixieland, blues, swing, bebop, Latin, rock, and free form. Comparisons and historical backgrounds will be made of each style. Works by composers such as Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Horace Silver, John Coltrane, and Herbie Hancock to mention but a few, will be mixed with such diverse music as cartoon, movie, contemporary pop, and group originals.

Throughout each demonstration concert, students will be encouraged to participate yet will be instructed in appropriate audience behavior within the jazz idiom.

Types focused presentations:

Primary (K-3)   The basic elements of music will be stressed. Swing, Latin, and blues styles will be demonstrated through jazz standards and popular music of young students (cartoon and movie). A piece will be created using the school mascot or like suggestion from the audience. Each instrument will be isolated for demonstration.

Elementary (4-6)   This presentation is very similar to the primary with a demonstration of how instrumentalists interact when improvising. Students will be asked to assist in the demonstration through the use of musical flash cards, which will illustrate various keys, time signatures, styles, and tempo.

Middle (7-8)   Cultural and historical elements will be stressed. Dixieland, rock, and bebop will be added to the demonstration. A tune will be dissected and examined.

Senior (9-12)   Cross discipline and cultural elements will be stressed. Free form and the music of other cultures will be included. The combining of different instrumental groupings will assist in demonstrating how various textures and musical colors can be a part of improvisation.

Adult   Presentations will incorporate all performance disciplines, focusing on group interaction and self-expression by individual performers. The ensemble will be used to demonstrate how performers work in unison to encourage individual expression within a structure format. The role of cultural and historical elements will be highlighted.