

Jazz muse steps into educational void

Empowerment | A trumpeter's program helps students gain skills that transcend music

By **LYNN DARROCH**
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It's 9 a.m. on a Monday, and Bryant Allard has just finished leading a two-hour jazz workshop for middle school students.

Those are odd hours for a jazz musician but not unusual for the director of a business that provides band programs for public and private schools in Oregon and California. By night Allard is a jazz trumpeter with a new CD ("Influences"), but by day he runs M.U.S.E. (Musical Understanding through Sound Education), a 20-year-old company offering once-a-week classes for fourth- through eighth-graders in more than 50 schools.

With cutbacks to music education in recent years, there are more opportunities for Bryant's before- and after-school programs, which are paid for solely by tuition.

Such programs, he believes, contribute to student success beyond the band room.

"It's not just about music," says Allard, 49. "With jazz improvisation, you're learning a skill that will help you deal with changing situations later in life." Those skills also are useful to the adults who fill Allard's Portland Woodshed Jazz Orchestra, which will open for his quartet on Monday at Jimmy Mak's. And the key to developing them, says the enthusiastic trumpeter, is to empower the student.

"It's taking a risk," he acknowledges, "but kids want you to empower them to take control, to figure it out for themselves. That's how you keep them interested and coming back: Give them opportunities to take those solos, even though they may not be well-developed. You've got to throw them in to sink or swim.



Bryant Allard

"It may not be the greatest solo, but they walk away with positive self-esteem. And that carries over to everything they do."

The Portland area has produced relatively large numbers of young jazz players capable of great solos. Last year, a local group won the Downbeat High School Jazz Combo award, and a crop of players in their early 20s, educated in Portland, have returned to surge to the front of the local scene.

The reason, Allard believes, is not the classes themselves but the great local players who inspire kids to take them — and inspire parents to offer support.

"When you have a strong jazz community, people want to get their kids involved," he says.

On his CD, "Influences," Allard has honored and emulated the great players who shaped his development. With Greg Gobel (piano), Dave Averre (drums) and Dan Presley (bass), Allard hones in on the classic Blue Note sound, the cornerstone of 1950s hard bop, and keeps the focus on his melodic trumpet lines. So it's both pretty and tough, and always driving forward.

And though he's standing on the shoulders of the giants who inspired him, Allard has made the style his own. His influences have empowered him to tell his own story in the same way he hopes to give students the opportunity to tell theirs.

Lynn Darroch is a Portland freelance writer; lynndarroch@yahoo.com