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A&M's jazz band enjoys performing, 'taking rides'

By Thomas Boylan

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

After more than a decade of playing jazz on campus, the Texas A&M Jazz Band attended its first competition earlier this month. The group picked up an acclamation as "outstanding performer" and took home a plaque from the 32nd Annual Sam Houston Jazz Festival.

The Jazz Band entered the competition through a connection between Victor Trevino, a trumpet player and sophomore biology major, and one of his friends in the Sam Houston Jazz Ensemble.

The two talked about the upcoming contest, and the Sam Houston Ensemble invited A&M to participate.

The Jazz Band is an informal organization — the members don't dress up in tuxedos or uniforms, and when they do want to dress alike, they all wear their black and white Jazz Band T-shirts.

The band includes five saxophones, trombones and trumpets and three or four rhythm players. Steve Gentry, a senior engineering technology major, is bass player and president of the club.

They play mostly big band classics from Buddy Rich, Glen Miller, Count Basie, Miles Davis and Sammy Nestico.

"We have a limited library (of music) and limited funds to expand the library, so we do a lot of the old standards," band president and senior engineering technology major Steve Gentry said.

Derek Soltes, band director and senior architecture major, said, "A new piece of music can cost up to \$300, though they usually run around \$200."

"We buy new music, one or two pieces a year, and we do swing, ballads and funky rock, with kind of a James Brown feel to it."

Their big band style doesn't limit them to the sheet music, however.

Soltes on occasion will point to a member of the band and let him or her "take a ride" — play an improvisation in the middle of a piece.

"An improvisation's a soloist kind of thing," Soltes said. "The music has chord changes, and the band member will take a solo while the band backs him up."

Composers often leave blank spots with nothing but a rhythm line so players can improvise.

Gentry said, "One reason I like our music over traditional big band is because their solos are written in a lot of the time."

By letting players improvise, their expertise is highlighted in a showcase not available when the entire band plays, Gentry said.

"We have some fantastic people, and just playing a regular tune you can't tell that, so we try to feature them," he said.

In particular, he is proud of the band's drummer, Andy Hieckl, a junior biochemistry major. "I think he's the best drummer at A&M," Gentry said.

The group goes back to the early 1970s — no one is exactly sure when it formed because their records don't go back that far.

The band holds auditions early each fall and as necessary thereafter if some members leave the group.

In the past, they allowed anyone who was interested to sit in with the band and play, staying for as long as they wanted.

However, setting no limitation on membership made the band too large on occasion, Gentry said, so auditions became necessary.

That does not mean that the band is not looking for interested musicians right now.

Soltes said, "We're always looking for new members — just drop in and bring your horn to rehearsals."

The Jazz Band plays in the Commons every Monday night in the West Piano Room.

Gentry said turnover time for the players is about a year.



Members of the Texas A&M Jazz Band.

Photo illustration by Frederick D. Joe

"There are only three people in now who have been in for more than a year," he said. "A lot of that is due to conflict with school."

Soltes has been a member of the Jazz Band for four years. He enjoys directing, but says, "I used to play trombone, and I kind of miss it. I pull it out every now and then, though."

He has little time to play music now, however, as an architecture major, a full time student and a mechanic at Car-Doc.

"I don't have much free time, and I spend my free time working, directing or studying," he said. "It

keeps me pretty busy."

Most of the Jazz Band members are engineering students (with one engineering faculty member), and both men and women are involved.

Because A&M does not offer a music major, an aspiring musician has limited options for practice in playing in a group. But Gentry says he is certain that a music major will be offered soon.

"I know they're working on one now," he said. "They have formed the committee to start the process."

Gentry recommends dropping by the Brazos Landing to watch the band members "taking a ride," be-

cause the club's atmosphere is conducive to cutting loose.

Soltes agrees, saying the band's style is club-like even in rehearsal.

"Rehearsals aren't really trials for new players," he said. "It's more of a club than a high-class atmosphere."

Both Gentry and Soltes strongly recommend attending the College Station Jazz Festival in Central Park on April 22.

"It's worth what you pay," Gentry said. "It starts in the morning and they play until midnight, with a different band every two hours."

Prices for the full day of jazz are \$2 a person or \$5 a family.

Those interested in joining or seeing the band can contact Gentry, Dan Carpenter, Jazz Band vice president, or Laura Shifflet, band secretary/treasurer.

Dr. Russ Pucket, the group's adviser, can be reached at 845-4951.

The Jazz Band will play several concerts around town in coming months. They include:

- March 8, Brazos Landing
- April 5, Brazos Landing
- April 7, Casino Night, flagroom of the MSC
- April 8, Rudder Fountain
- April 22, College Station Jazz Festival, Central Park.

Mission starts second century of providing homes, care, hope to Fort Worth transients

FORT WORTH (AP) — When Michael Tucker came to the Union Gospel Mission six months ago, he was a San Antonio high school dropout who spent his time roaming with street gangs.

Because of encouragement and counseling from the mission staff, Tucker, 18, now wants to finish high school and begin electronics training.

The Union Gospel Mission, one of Fort Worth's oldest charitable institutions, is beginning its second century of helping homeless and poor people get back on their feet by providing hot meals, clothing, educational opportunities and a haven from the streets.

"When I got to Fort Worth, I got a job selling roses on street corners," Tucker said.

"I was just walking by the mission one day, and the cook asked me if I needed a job," Tucker said. "I said, 'Yes.' Thanks to everyone here at the mission, I'm gonna get to finish high school, which I wouldn't be able to do on my own."

When the Union Gospel Mission was founded in 1888 by ministers and businessmen, it provided shelter for the homeless and temporary housing for railroad workers. Soldiers returning from World War I also found shelter there.

Chuck Wiley, executive director at the mission, said historical records are sketchy. "When I tried to get information on the mission, I found that nobody really had a good handle on what had gone on."

The Union Gospel Mission had its home in downtown Fort Worth in the area once called Hell's Half Acre, which was known for its bar-

room fights, gambling and prostitution.

In 1979, the mission moved to its present location at 1331 East Lancaster Ave. In 1981, it expanded and opened a family center for women and children needing shelter.

It always has been a non-denominational, non-profit organization that receives no government aid. Donations come from individuals, churches, foundations and businesses, Wiley said.

Wiley, 46, said he is amazed at the number of people who come to the mission. In 1988, more than 75,000 men, women and children were helped.

The shelter has room for about 100 male transients, and people who are on Social Security can rent rooms or cubicles. The family center has space for 50 women and children, Wiley said.

To help people get back on their feet, the mission first offers emergency care — shelter and food.

"Then, we want to help folks get back in to a mainstream where they can get work," Wiley said. "We want to give everyone the help and encouragement they need."

Transients can stay at the mission for free their first three nights, but after the third night they are asked to pay \$3.50 to help with expenses.

If they wish, transients can cook, clean or do other work for free room and board.

Most staff members began working at the mission while they were on the streets. They began by cooking and cleaning but gradually earned more responsibilities.

Arthur Stukes, who is the assistant resident manager, came to Fort

Worth from South Carolina in the early 1980s. "This job never has a dull moment," he said.

Stukes, 33, spends his days helping people apply for welfare and Social Security, taking them to the doctor or picking up supplies.

When he started working at the mission, he wanted to spend two weeks living on the streets to get a better understanding of the people he helps. He lasted only four days.

"You always feel vulnerable out there," Stukes said. "You're always looking behind your back. Nothing is protected."

"If you turn your head too long, there could be trouble," he said. "There are some criminals out there. Don't get me wrong. Not all street people are like that. You find people with a high moral character who are upstanding. They will help you all they can. But you do have that small, dangerous element out there whose sole purpose is to take from others."

Don Baker, 51, came to live at the Union Gospel Mission eight months ago after he broke his hip. He was between jobs at the time and couldn't get hired because of his disability.

"I didn't have any bad feelings about myself," he said. "It was the fact that I was incapacitated at the time, and the people who were hiring wouldn't take me because I couldn't do the work they wanted."

Baker now is the office supervisor and makes sure things run smoothly. When he arrived, he worked in the kitchen.

Because the mission was founded on Christian principles, everyone is

asked to attend a short devotional before the evening meal, Wiley said.

"We want these people to see that we genuinely care about them," he said. "We emphasize the spiritual aspect, but we don't push it. We want to present the Gospel to people, but we don't have anyone choking them and saying they have to accept it."

The mission offers a program for people who have accepted Christianity, called New Start. The program is available to men living at the mission, but Wiley hopes to expand New Start to include women.

The men in the program focus on Bible studies and getting involved in churches.

The Rev. Bill Russell, associate pastor of Lamplighter Baptist Mission in Fort Worth, volunteers to preach during many worship services.

"I love encouraging people," Russell said. "A lot of trials in my life have taught me to empathize with the people here."

The mission recently bought a warehouse across the street from the main building and started a bargain outlet where people can buy used clothing, appliances, and furniture. The outlet provides work for people staying at the mission.

"I'm encouraged because I think society is starting to realize the problems the homeless face," Wiley said. "At one time, our society didn't want to hear about the homeless. They wanted to ignore it, but now I think on the whole, the public is beginning to realize that we have a problem and that the homeless are not a bunch of dirty, scrounging bums we can just throw away."

Obituaries never say enough about the deceased

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Horses, they have track records. Right there in the racing form.

Won. Lost. Sire. Dam. Purses. Best times.

People just get obituaries. Seventy-five years in the trenches and the hometown paper kisses people goodbye as if they spent their lives as assistant purchasing agents for Ajax Manufacturing Co. after graduating from West Fork High School. Funeral services 11 a.m. Tuesday.

Women are lucky to make the obit pages at all because all they ever did was to raise three children, wash the dog after it chased a skunk and make the beds every morning.

Where's the meat?

Shakespeare's Marc Antony says, "... the good is oft interred with their bones..."

No offense, Will, but the good

stuff is ALWAYS interred with their bones.

Take the late Col. Fraser Moffat. The alumni magazine of his alma mater paid due respect to his business and military career.

But nowhere did it mention that well into life he could still balance a dozen empty beer bottles end on end.

The father of a colleague gave his own father last rites three times, unnecessarily as it turned out.

Being about 10, he didn't exactly know procedure so he tried three different versions. Think that stopped any presses? Nope. He was publicly remembered, albeit justly, for managing restaurants.

Obits will list survivors, but rarely, unless you're a ruling monarch, ancestors.

There's a happy housewife I met in California who has survived descent of Jesse and Frank James, the

Youngers and the Daltons without robbing nary a bank. Not obit material in spite of what it may tell us about the sins of the father or even dead cousins.

In life we are surrounded by "what ifs" and other narrow escapes. Not in death.

So how come obits never say what made us cry at the funeral and laugh at the wake?

Alumni magazines are particularly remiss. Most of 'em just say "deceased."

But part of the news is how our old pals departed this realm and what they'd done since we last saw them pouring punch over their heads at senior houseparties. Did they make a hole-in-one? Win a lottery? Scale Mt. Everest?

Did they die in a bar fight in the Klondike? Lose a duel to a jealous husband? Did their parachutes fail

to open? Don't ask the obit.

There's a tradition at Princeton University for freshmen to try and climb up the ivy at Nassau Hall and steal the clapper from the bell so everyone will have an excuse for not getting to 8 o'clock class on time.

One guy not only got the clapper, he also found out where they hid all the spare clappers and pinched them, too. Obit material? Are you kidding?

Last words get dropped from our lives as well.

When Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian playwright, lay dying, his night nurse told the day nurse the patient seemed to be slightly better.

"Tvertimod," gasped the failing Ibsen. In English that says, "On the contrary."

Obits never give us a chance to say "So long."

Therapeutic massage legitimate, healthful

PITTSBURGH (AP) — After hours hunched over a steering wheel, breathing bus fumes and fighting traffic, chauffeur Michael Manganaro needs to be kneaded.

For him, it's a company perk, the kind of service offered State Department bureaucrats, professional athletes and a growing number of other Americans.

Manganaro and about 200 other employees of H.J. Heinz Co. can kick off their shoes and sink into a padded chair for a 15-minute rubdown once a week in a quiet conference room at the company's downtown headquarters.

"Driving in the city really can tense you up," Manganaro, 41, says as he gets out of the chair.

"This really relaxes you. It really makes you feel good."

The rubdowns are offered as part of a new stress-reduction program in which the company pays half of the \$12.50 fee for 15 minutes.

It's one example of how massage is going mainstream in the United States.

Thousands of Americans are

in poor chairs, carrying a purse or gym bag on only one shoulder, falling asleep in front of the television can do things to the circulation and the muscle structure that are just not kind."

Founded in 1943, the association's membership has jumped 500 percent to about 7,500 mem-

"Everyone is affected by a busier lifestyle. It's just taking 15 minutes out of your day to totally relax."

— Sabina Vidunas, massage therapist

bers in the past five years.

Most states don't license massage therapists, so the association has developed a program of certification that requires members to spend at least six months at an approved school, including 500 hours of classroom time, Arbetter says.

The cost of a massage varies from \$20 to \$80 per hour, depending on the location and the therapist's training, he says.

"Massage doesn't cure or treat, but what it does try to do is get some type of balance in the body by loosening tight muscles and allowing tensions on the opposite sides of the body to be more equal," Arbetter says.

Sabina Vidunas gives the massages at Heinz. Like most of today's practitioners, she has distanced herself from the image of the sleazy massage parlor and refers to herself as a massage therapist, not a masseuse.

She studied massage for a year at the Swedish Institute in New York City after working as a registered nurse for five years.

The Heinz employees remain clothed as Vidunas kneads the upper body, including scalp and hands, in a sort of mini-massage that uses no oil.

"Everyone is affected by a busier lifestyle," Vidunas says. "It's just taking 15 minutes out of your day to totally relax."

Even in the offices of the State Department in Washington, D.C., massage is a hit.

Employees pay for the services of Bahaa Karra, whose company, Washington Health Systems, comes to the office basement twice a week to offer massages ranging from 15 minutes for \$11 to an hour for \$44.

"I'm booked full for two or three weeks in advance," Karra says.

"Cradling the phone between the ear and the shoulder, sitting