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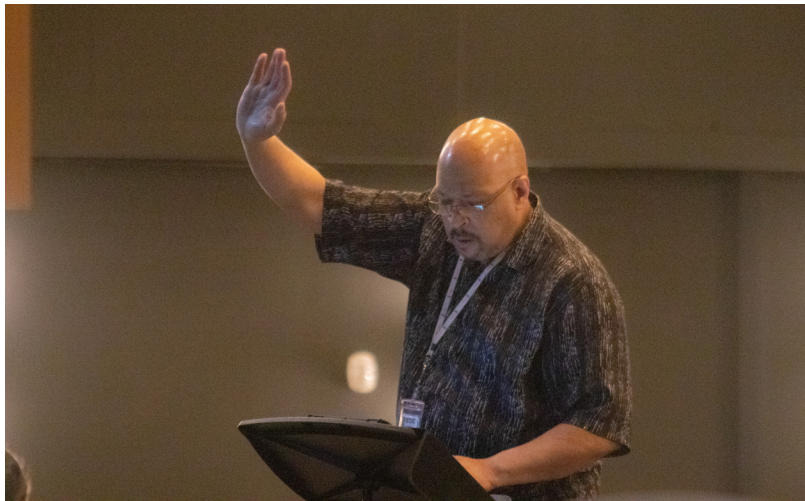
Students who play the keyboard and drums practice at Roger Palmer Performing Arts Center in preparation for the annual TJC Jazz Fest.

Photo by Will Kaiser



The TJC Jazz Fest features two 18-piece ensembles. Guest trombonist Ben Patterson will be performing alongside the students.

Photo by Will Kaiser



George Faber, adjunct professor, leads the all-student TJC Jazz Ensemble as they rehearse.

Photo by Garrison Nichols



The keyboard plays an important role in jazz, as it usually lays the baseline chords for the other artists to play on.

Photo by Garrison Nichols



The TJC Jazz Fest is also an educational opportunity, as TJC invites local schools to jazz clinics to offer advice on their performances.

Photo by Garrison Nichols

'Dig Dis:' Take a look inside the spring Jazz Fest with Heather Mensch, music department chair at TJC

Heather Mensch, music department chair, teaches trombone private lessons and helps with the jazz program at TJC. Mensch shared her insight into the TJC Jazz Fest, which took place on March 2 and 3.



Q: As a jazz and trombone professor, what inspiration do you take from other jazz artists?

A: Oh, gosh, that's really why 18 years ago we started the Jazz Festival. One of the things I wanted to do is to have my students get the same experience that I got. And so one of the things that I remember from my undergraduate career, when I played in the jazz band, or when I played in the wind ensemble, was just whenever there was a guest artist that would come through, and the interaction that I got to have with them. The things you pick up from someone who does music as a profession is a very different world. And so you have to kind of set your sights on that and kind of learn about the world. And the best way to do that is hands on. It's always inspirational to have, for me this year, they got started as a trombonist. And I actually didn't choose that our trumpet professor chose the guest artist, but what we try and do is rotate the instrument. So this year, we happen to be a trombone year. Ben Patterson is one of the most fantastic solo jazz artists that we have running around the U.S. and internationally. He's used to serve in the Airmen of Note, which is the premier Air Force jazz ensemble that stays in Washington, D.C., and he ended up being the musical director of that, as well. He's well versed. He's a great educator. So one of the things that we tried to do when we started the Jazz Festival was getting that kind of person of that caliber of player and educator, we're looking for the the whole bag, we're looking for a great player. So

our job is to find great educators who are great performers as well. That helps inspire our students to check out as many options professionally as possible. That's what we were designed to do every year. You always listen to recordings and you hit Spotify and your Apple Music Playlist and you know, things like that, but ultimately jazz is a verbal language. And so that's one of the things that is an oral tradition that gets

passed down from generation to generation. If someone just picked up a book and says, 'Teach me how to play jazz,' that's really hard. You know, you can kind of put it into words and trust me, it's been done but, but there's nothing like just immersing yourself in it and learning from someone like what we call a master teacher who's doing that all the time. That's where I get my inspiration is every year when we do the festival, just watching our students light up a little bit more than they normally do. We always joke about when your parents tell you something, and then when somebody else that you admire tells you something the exact same way and exact same thing, you hear it a little bit better. So, yeah, sometimes it's validation as an instructor, and sometimes it's really just to watch them get really motivated very quickly.

Q: What should someone expect going into a jazz ensemble or other ensembles?

Our music department aims to please, especially in a jazz concert. It's a very different type of concert from say, like a wind ensemble or an orchestra concert or a choir concert. The jazz concerts are what we call a little looser. If you think of your favorite rock concert when you go and you know, the lighters are up, and you know, that kind of thing is not quite there, but we'd like you to enjoy what you're listening to. You're gonna hear all different styles of music. We'd like

you to enjoy what you're listening to. You're gonna hear all different styles of music, you're gonna hear our students learning how to solo and their goal, ultimately, is for you to just have a great time and walk away humming a tune, kind of uplifting your day. We want people to get in the seats and enjoy the live experience, because we all know that it's way different when you when you go to a concert live than it is just kind of putting the recording on and going 'Oh, yeah, that was nice.' It's an immersive experience. That's what you want. And so all of our music department, when we do a concert, that's what we're looking for. We're trying to tap into you emotionally and spiritually. And we're also just trying to educate the person when they walk in the door. And so we want to play different styles of music, so you'll be exposed to as many different things as possible.

Q: How should someone know what ensemble to choose?

A: A lot of our ensembles hit certain niches. Students who've been in jazz before love to come and plug right in. But we have tons of students who've actually never done jazz before, and we've kind of convinced them, 'Hey, this is something cool and you should try.' What we're trying to do here at TJC, is have a fully operational music department, just like you'd find at any other four-year school. We're kind of slowly growing and getting bigger and better at what we do. Ultimately, our goal whether they're a music major or not, is to build the person and build the character and teach them a nice work ethic because that's essentially what a music group does is kind of educates you all the way around.

**Interview conducted by Garrison Nichols, multimedia journalist. Quotes have been lightly edited for length and clarity. For full interview, visit thedrumbeat.com.*

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