



The Eastman Jazz Ensemble and three major players: bassist Jeff Campbell, trumpeter Clay Jenkins, and conductor Bill Dobbins.

Eastman heats up third International Jazz Festival

By Russell Scarbrough

WHEN COMMENCEMENT is over in May, much of Eastman kicks back to enjoy a few laid-back, warm months of summer. However, for the faculty and remaining students of the Jazz & Contemporary Media (JCM) Department, things get even busier. Ensembles rehearse, new music is passed out, and the whole community begins to anticipate what has become not just the biggest jazz event, but also one of Rochester's most popular events of the year.

Inaugurated in 2002, the Rochester International Jazz Festival (RIJF) has grown into a major regional attraction that brings the biggest names in jazz to upstate New York. Skeptics questioned if Rochester could support it, but three years and over 100,000 attendees later, the RIJF is a bona fide success story. Along with a number of festival partners, Eastman has been a major sponsor of the festival, guaranteeing a showcase for Eastman jazz faculty and students.

For the entire festival, Gibbs Street was closed to traffic, allowing for vendors and a large stage with free concerts. Major head-

liners, such as Sonny Rollins, Tony Bennett, Dave Brubeck, and this year, David Sanborn, Oscar Peterson, and Bobby McFerrin and Jack DeJohnette, have filled the Theatre every night. Smaller acts, particularly international ones relatively unknown to American audiences, played in Rochester's traditional upscale jazz venues—Milestones, the Montage Grille, and Max of Eastman Place—as well as Kilbourn Hall.

Sunday night has become Eastman's night to shine at RIJF. Emceed by Jazz Department chair Harold Danko, the Eastman Jazz Showcase gives students the opportunity to play before a capacity crowd of jazz enthusiasts, local and national jazz press, and other out-of-town musicians. Showcase concerts have featured the Eastman Youth Jazz Orchestra, the jazz department's latest *Down Beat* magazine Student Music Award winners, and the Eastman Jazz Ensemble, directed by Bill Dobbins.

The Eastman Jazz Ensemble is recognized as one of the premiere collegiate big bands in the country, and the RIJF offers a chance for the ensemble to play in the international jazz spotlight on its home stage. The "RIJF edi-

tion" of the Eastman Jazz Ensemble is made up of current members and recent alumni, and performs highlights from its past season and student compositions.

Since *Down Beat's* Student Music Award winners are announced in May, the RIJF is the perfect opportunity to feature Eastman's winners. In 2004, not only did individual soloists Dalton Ridenhour and Jared Schonig win accolades for Outstanding Soloist, but also a student ensemble, the Very Tall Band (so named because several members stand well over six feet tall) won awards for Best College Jazz Instrumental Group.

Eastman faculty members are also familiar faces. Harold Danko and Bill Dobbins joined Marian McPartland for a three-piano concert on the Eastman Theatre stage, which also featured drummer Rich Thompson and bassist Jeff Campbell. Trumpeter Clay Jenkins and guitarist Bob Sneider are also frequent RIJF performers, and the Dave Rivello Ensemble is becoming a staple of the festival.

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