

Cedar Hill brothers lead jazz group in New Orleans

By LIZ OLIPHANT
Contributor

Five high school students from Dallas, Grand Prairie and Highland Village and two brothers from Cedar Hill showcased their talents at the Jazz Educators Network national convention Jan. 9 in New Orleans.

The audience included professional jazz musicians, college admissions officers, instructors, composers, exhibitors, parents and competing bands.

The group, Jazz Combo 1 from the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, featured Matthew Babineaux on alto sax, Lessie Vonner on trumpet, Andrew Durham on guitar, Grayson Schweers on bass and Michael Mitchell on drums. It was one of only 30 bands from across the county invited to perform during the conference.

Two Booker T. alumni from Cedar Hill — Matt Marantz on alto sax and Luke Marantz on piano — joined the student group on



Members of the Jazz Combo are Grayson Schweers (back left), Michael Mitchell, Leslie Vonner (front left), Matthew Babineaux and Andrew Durham.

Photo submitted by LIZ OLIPHANT

stage as guests artists.

Booker T. Washington High School is recognized for turning out top jazz musicians such as Roy Hargrove, Norah Jones, Erika Badu, Keith Anderson, Edie Brickell and Frank LoCrao. Its students have won 215 *DownBeat Magazine* Student Music Awards

— more than any school in the country. The Marantz brothers won 43 of those awards.

"It's all about the kids," said Bart Marantz, director of jazz studies at the high school and father of Matt and Luke Marantz. "These invitations to national conferences and festivals allow the students to show off their chops

to professionals who offer them college scholarships or other performance opportunities that they'd never have otherwise."

In March, the students will spend a week as peer teachers in an Omaha, Neb., high school under the umbrella of the Thelonious Monk Institute. They also have been invited to perform at the Monterrey Jazz Festival in California.

Both Marantz brothers were invited to play at the Jazz Educators Network conference with other groups. Luke Marantz is a member of the New England Conservatory's Honors Jazz Combo, Ro Sham Beaux. Matt Marantz plays with his own combo and with the Thelonious Monk Institute's six-piece jazz combo.

Matt Marantz also performed with the late Billy Taylor at the Kennedy Center and for President George W. Bush at the White House.

Liz Oliphant contributes to neighborsgo.com on behalf of Booker T. Washington High School.