

# Arts Magnet jazz combo ranks among the nation's best

Continued from Page 1E.

1984 and *Mile Stones* last year — receiving rave reviews.

A down beat reviewer wrote, "The several ensembles perform a variety of pieces in a wide range of styles, including jazz standards and originals, with many of the arrangements written by students. . . . Granted, the ensemble aspects tend to be more secure than solos, in general, but these 10th-, 11th- and 12th-graders offer idiomatically (and harmonically) correct improvisations, some of which are splendid."

(The albums are on sale at the school.)

The students work in an atmosphere that encourages artistic achievement, and Marantz, who has toured extensively with Ray Charles and the Glenn Miller Orchestra, pushes the students to be the best they can be. "He expects you to go after it yourself," says saxophonist Monique Jackson, 17.

Says pianist Damon Criswell, 17, "We are made interested in a lot of different types of music. They expect you to learn everything, so when you leave you are on the level of a professional musician."

The students play in public often. During this school year, they made 20 appearances outside the school district, and last year they made 50. This year's combo offered its final performance last week at the Hyatt Regency downtown.

Three students in the combo



The Dallas Morning News: Nurt Vallbona

Alto saxophone player Ken Fields gets in some licks at a rehearsal.

now play part or full time with professional musicians.

Drummer Aaron Comess, 18, who won a "deebee" for outstanding performance on drums, can be seen playing with two groups — Craig Wallace and The Out, and Texas Slim and Blue Ice.

Criswell jams with the local rock group Inner Action. He has been selected as one of the outstanding young musicians in the country by the National Jazz Ensemble and toured England last summer with the Fort Worth Jazz Band. Joining him in Inner Action is bass guitarist

Darrell Phillips, 18, who is also a 1986 "deebee" award winner.

A member of the lab band, oboist Roger Roe, 18, won a "deebee" for a classical solo number this year. He plays with local chamber groups and will play with the Fort Worth Youth Orchestra in London this

summer.

The quality of music the students play has amazed many jazz musicians and educators. Chris Curless, director of the Wichita (Kan.) Jazz Festival, heard the album *Impressions* and said, "I was impressed. There aren't that many sharp high school bands. I gave the album to my favorite jazz radio DJ, and he played it. It went over big here."

Down beat judge David Baker, chairman of the jazz department at Indiana University, says, "It's one of the two or three extraordinary programs in the country. The quality of students there is frightening. They are amazing kids."

A competitor also offered compliments. Justin DiCioccio, director of jazz studies at the School of Performing Arts in New York City, wrote to Marantz, "What wonderful music. . . . Without question you have a top-notch program."

The program also includes hitting the books. Marantz reminds his aspiring students that they must strive to achieve good grades. "Academics are very important here," he says, making a fist.

The students are aware that they, like athletes, are affected by the no-pass, no-play rule. "We are aware of House Bill 72," says trumpeter Roy Hargrove, 16. "You have to have your academics down or you don't perform."

Arts Magnet school students have received academic recognition as well as musical awards:

eight National Merit Scholars and four Outstanding Negro Student achievement awards in the nine years the school has been in existence. Principal James Gray says that 82 percent of the school's graduates go to college.

Those high grades and musical talents have led to a bidding war among major colleges for the Arts Magnet students. "We have schools calling all the time for the kids," Marantz says. "The best jazz schools — Berklee School of Music (in Boston), North Texas State University and the University of Miami — all want certain students."

Roe, a 4.0 student and National Merit Scholar, has received inquiries from all those schools and hundreds of others. "Every day I come home from school, there is a stack of letters from schools all over the nation," says Roe, who plans to seek a career with a symphony. "The big names like Yale to the little schools you never think of. Some of them sent full scholarships outright, saying if you come here you don't have to pay anything."

He eventually accepted a full scholarship to attend SMU that included a year of study overseas.

But back in the rehearsal hall, the combo has started into another groovy tune, Herbie Hancock's *Maiden Voyage*.

Marantz turns and says, "These kids have jelled into a smoking ensemble."

It seems hard to find someone who would argue with that.