



Bart Marantz directs the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts Jazz Combo from Dallas.

Photo courtesy Bart Marantz

## High school combo on par with professionals

By JEFFREY JONES  
Tribune Staff Writer

The lights are low.  
The crowd is silent.  
And from the stage, classic jazz sounds are raining down.

The trumpet lets loose with a screaming solo, bouncing short, snappy riffs off the ceiling, keeping in tune with the strong rhythms spanked out by the bass player. The pianist follows closely, his fingers strutting up and down the ivories as though possessed. The combo musically moves and melds together like chocolate syrup blending with melted ice cream.

Where are these sweet sounds coming from?

It ain't the Branford Marsalis Quartet, cats. It ain't the Crusaders or the Miles Davis Quintet, either.

This strong, clean jazz combo sound is being laid down by the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts Jazz Combo from Dallas. The group opens at 7 p.m. Friday for composer and pianist Dave Brubeck at the 23rd annual UNC/Greeley Jazz Festival.

"This is the most balanced small group I've had," says Bart Marantz, the director of jazz studies and of the jazz combo for the high school. "There's not

one weak link. Everyone is a soloist."

Marantz, a trumpet and flugelhorn player, has been the director of jazz studies at the school for eight years, and has performed with such big-name artists as Ray Charles and the Glenn Miller Orchestra. In Marantz's tenure at the Dallas high school, his bands and students have won 49 awards from *Down Beat* magazine, a publication devoted to jazz groups and artists.

This year's jazz combo is made up of six players with different ethnic backgrounds. Although none of the students in the group is over age 18, Marantz says some of the teens are ready to — and do — perform professionally.

"I've got a pianist who's really one of the 'next' players," says Marantz in reference to piano player Jon Johnston, 18. "You're really going to hear from this kid."

Marantz also has high praise for 18-year-old saxophonist Gabe Dorrell.

"If he (Dorrell) isn't leading an area of the industry, he'll definitely be making a statement," says Marantz.

Last year's combo, which included many of the players in this year's group, produced a live album, "Arts Jazz '90 'Live,'" in conjunction with other jazz groups at the school. The combo also

performs at various functions around the Dallas area to raise money for trips.

"We raise most of our money by playing gigs," says Marantz. "The kids bring themselves to excellence, and we sell that. We don't sell lollypops."

Another jazz combo and a vocal jazz group from the high school are coming to the UNC festival this year to be judged by jazz clinicians, and the first jazz combo donated some of its earnings to help pay the expenses of the other combo. The performers will be in Greeley Wednesday through Sunday.

"We'll be going to clinics and the evening concerts, and listening to other groups from other parts of the country (that) we wouldn't normally get to hear," Marantz says. "The camaraderie of being away from home and being together as a group is very important."

For the concert, the combo will perform three tunes, including "Miami Wise," a composition written by Bobby Meyer, one of Marantz's playing buddies.

"It's ('Miami Wise' is) a Latin piece that takes me back to my heritage," says Marantz.

The combo also will play "Lotus Blossom," an arrangement that spotlights the solo abilities of the performers.

Marantz promises an exciting performance. He hand-picks the players for the combo, and is confident the group will provide a worthy opening for Dave Brubeck.

"(These kids have) desire, discipline and dedication," says Marantz. "... It's a privilege to be involved with the UNC jazz festival."

Gene Aitken, UNC's director of jazz studies, says the high school has a national reputation for turning out quality players and performances.

"They are well known in the United States by reputation, and they're winners of *Down Beat* awards year after year," says Aitken. "The school turns out many students who go right from high school directly into the professional world."

The school has an enrollment of about 650 students, and is divided into five educational clusters: music, visual arts, dance, theater and academics. Students are accepted from inside and outside the district. The school also has attracted students from other states. All students must audition for admittance.

"What keeps me excited is the talent of these students," says Marantz. "You're able to direct them musically and also with life. There's every reason to be doing this. If you want to enjoy life, this is the school to teach at."



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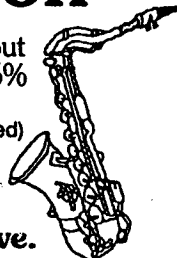
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