

Selling all that jazz

Booker T.'s band teacher beats the drum for Dallas recognition

By Jonathan Eig

If Bart Marantz's walls could talk, they would sing, swing and boogie, and they would tell the story of one of the Dallas Independent School District's best-kept secrets.

As we enter the band room at the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, Mr. Marantz is standing on a chair hammering a nail into one of the walls, hanging the school's 62nd award from *downbeat* magazine, the jazz world's most respected monthly.

In addition to the magazine's awards, the walls hold 17 DISD certificates, three resolutions from Texas governors, three mayoral honors, one letter from a president and dozens of photos of former students gone on to fame, fortune or at least three square meals a day as professional musicians.

The only thing missing is Mr. Marantz's own award. Now in his 10th year as jazz instructor at Booker T., Mr. Marantz just received one of *downbeat*'s International Achievement Awards. He hasn't gotten the plaque yet.

Mr. Marantz says the awards prove that Booker T. works.

"This is a very powerful, smoking educational institution," the 43-year-old jazz man says, "with an emphasis on producing not just educated people but artists."

When Mr. Marantz left an Orlando, Fla., community college 10 years ago for Dallas, the band room walls were covered with nothing but rags, a lame attempt at cushioning the raucous big-band

sounds resounding within. But if the equipment was ragged, the music was anything but.

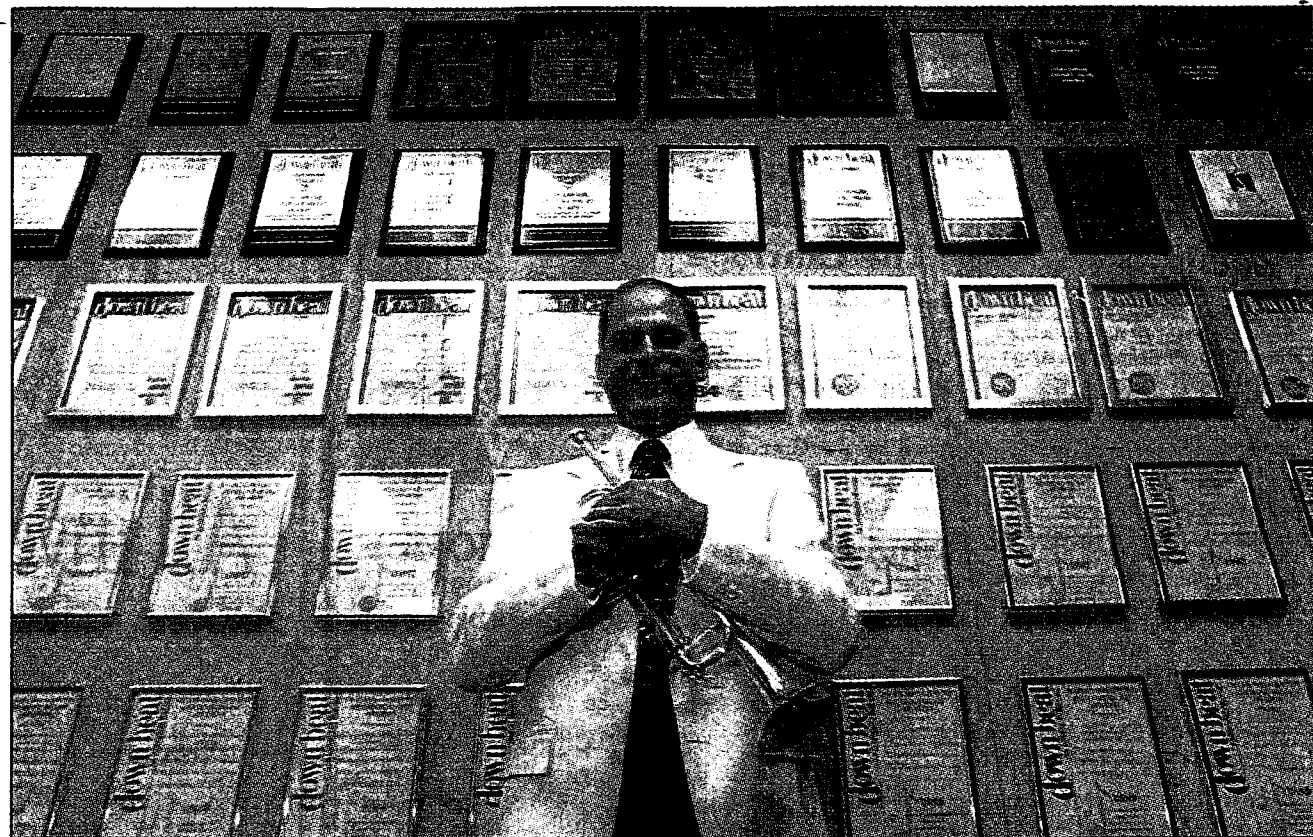
"I was blown away by the musicianship of the kids," Mr. Marantz says. "I listened for a few seconds and said I'd really like to sign a contract."

The music has been great ever since. Booker T. bands have recorded 12 albums, and at least 13 former students have graduated to record for major record labels. Dozens more have gone on to the nation's finest music colleges. And one, Roy Hargrove, has become a star.

While he was playing with the Booker T. bands, Mr. Hargrove's hard-driving, crystalline sound caught the attention of Doc Severinsen and Wynton Marsalis. Doc gave Mr. Hargrove a new trumpet so the teen-ager could stop borrowing an instrument owned by the school district.

Mr. Hargrove's resounding international success has helped boost Booker T.'s profile. While the jazz program has garnered worldwide recognition, in Dallas it has remained relatively unknown.

So unknown, in fact, that Mr. Marantz's most ambitious promotional scheme has collapsed. The Dallas Arts Jazz Festival raised \$250,000 for student scholarships and brought big-name jazz musicians to the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center. At one point, Mr. Marantz, who drives a 12-year-old Toyota, signed for loans to keep the festival alive. The festival



Bart Marantz amid the 62-plus awards earned by the world-famous Booker T. Washington marching band. PHOTO: Juan Garbis

recouped the money but died for lack of support after its third year.

Such apathy toward jazz led Mr. Marantz, a trumpeter, to give up playing professionally.

He took up the trumpet at 10, began playing professionally around his hometown of Miami at 14 and went on to study at the New England Conservatory of Music. That's where he met his wife, Sara, a church organist. They have two children, Matthew, 7, and Luke, 2.

"I guess opposites attract," he said, in reference to his wife. "She's classical and I'm jazz." And Dallas seems to be more of a classical town.

"I think jazz is on the upswing," he said, "but Dallas has a hard time

with it. There's no real jazz radio station here. For a large city, a real metropolis, I think Dallas is struggling."

Mr. Marantz is still searching for a sponsor to rescue the festival, though he declines donations from alcohol and cigarette companies. The festival, he said, gave students a reason to practice and offered them hope of scholarships.

Their education goes beyond jazz. Between musical instructions, a few scat phrases designed to show young musicians how a passage of notes should sound, Mr. Marantz reminds his students that no-pass, no-play regulations apply to musicians as well as football

players. If they want to stay in the band, they've got to get good grades.

Gordon Pope, a ferocious young drummer and a junior at Booker T., says Mr. Marantz teaches the work ethic students need to graduate from high school and make it as successful musicians.

"I want to go pro after college, and this is a good place to start," said Gordon, between his attacks on a rattling old drum set the school can't afford to replace. "He just tries to instill the best in us."

Mr. Marantz complains that he can't do more for the students — can't raise the money to accept an invitation to the Montreux Jazz Festival, can't bring in any more

scholarship money through his own festival, can't afford a new a new drum set for the school.

But all these problems shrink away in the band room, where the blare of trumpets, the crash of cymbals, the oohs and ahhs of saxophones and the bump-bumps of bass bounce deliriously off Mr. Marantz's proud walls.

"It's a jolting experience to hear the kind of talent in this institution," he says. "I look at this room and, I mean, what can I say? Wow. It's beyond your wildest dreams as an instructor. To have this kind of quality student and for a moment to work with them, for a moment, to touch that excellence."