Jazz On Campus

Philly Scene Reflects Temple’s Expanding Jazz Program

FEW JAZZ PROGRAMS EMBRACE THE CITY

in which they’re located with the enthusiasm that Temple University’s Boyer College of Music and Dance shows for Philadelphia.

“Temple is a cornerstone of Philadelphia,” said trumpeter Terell Stafford, Boyer’s chair of instrumental studies and director of jazz studies.

“Philadelphia has a great history and jazz scene,” added Dick Oatts, the veteran saxophonist who has been a faculty member for 11 years.

“Temple is a family, and all the students, no matter what their level, are a part of that family.”

Of course, with New York City just 90 minutes away by road or rail, Temple students and faculty members frequently make the commute, either to play a gig or to take in a show. “There is a lot of interaction [with faculty],” Stafford said, “and that really helps give our students a representative view of what music is really like.”

In addition, Temple’s 125 jazz majors and 20 master of music students also have an opportunity to experience the music scene in the Netherlands, through an exchange program with the Amsterdam Conservatory of Music.

“I’ve had a 20-year relationship with an artist-in-residence,” Oatts said, “and it’s been a thrill for Temple students to listen to jazz students on a global level. There are over 60 countries represented at the conservatory, and our Temple students always return home with such a determination and resolve.”

With high-profile faculty like Stafford, Oatts, Bruce Barth, Tim Warfield, Temple prides itself on its emphasis on one-on-one training.

“This amazing faculty represents a togetherness and one primary goal: to serve the student,” Oatts said. “Students at Temple have a wide variety of options in teachers, and can focus on core values in sound, technique and history that help them evolve in becoming an instrumentalist, composer or teacher.”

While the traditional emphasis has been on large ensemble work—resulting in six big bands within the program—the number of smaller groups has burgeoned to more than 30.

“Now, we have everything from organ trios to string ensembles,” Stafford said. “And, while our main concentration is on straightahead jazz language, our students explore many areas outside the mainstream.”

The growth of Temple’s three bachelor of music programs—in jazz instrumental performance, jazz vocal performance and jazz composition/arranging—has led to a two-year, 30-credit M.M. program with an emphasis on career development and entrepreneurial techniques.

“The name of the game in our master’s program is collaboration,” Stafford said. “We’re drawing students from different schools, and that really opens up the opportunities for us and for our students.”

“The maturity of the students and the experience they bring to Temple is great, and it’s going to add to the overall jazz program,” Oatts said. “Our undergraduates can see firsthand what a difference a few years of study can make. The M.M. students definitely encourage and embrace this evolution.”

As he looks to the future, Stafford can see a time when the growth of jazz within Boyer College will influence some administrative decisions. “Right now, we’re not capped and it’s not impossible for students to get in, as long as they can make the grade at Temple as an institution,” he said. “We’ve grown from 20 students to 145 in a relatively short time, and we have a super-supportive administration. So I can safely say that we’ll continue on our current path to deliver a really great educational experience.”

—James Hale