

Asper grant to fund jazz professor

IN the last several years, the faculty of music at the University of Manitoba has developed its jazz studies program into one of the premiere places to study jazz in Canada.

Led largely by faculty director Steve Kirby and the dean of the faculty of music, Edmund Dawe, it has grown from humble beginnings into a full four-year bachelor of jazz studies program encompassing composition, performance, arranging and pedagogy. It is the only one of its kind in Western Canada.

In its first year, which began this past September, the four-year program has a full slate of students, a new faculty member in internationally renowned drummer Terreon Gully, and its most recent coup was the announcement that the Asper Foundation would be donating \$1 million to the faculty in support of a professorship in jazz performance.

The announcement of the Babs Asper Professorship in Jazz Performance was made during a recent ceremony at the university where a plaque was unveiled and it was announced that the donation would be used to attract more top-flight faculty members to the program.

"This professorship in jazz performance helps us attract outstanding faculty members who will raise the calibre of the university's jazz program to a higher level, and attract more fine students along the way," U of M president and vice-chancellor David Barud told the crowd. "It helps our jazz studies program flourish and helps our students reach for the stars."

Babs Asper is a well-known jazz enthusiast, and along with her late husband Izzy and the Asper Foundation, has been a longtime supporter of many artistic endeavours in Winnipeg.

"Our family's range of interest in the University of Manitoba is represented in many areas, but given Izzy's love of music and of jazz in particular, I wanted to support this new and flourishing aspect of the Marcel A. Desautels Faculty of Music," she said.

With the grant, the program co-ordinators are hoping to hire a full-time jazz professor in time for the start of the school year in September 2009. Kirby said the faculty is just beginning the process of searching for the new instructor:

"The committee is hoping to find someone by May, have them hired in July and be ready to start teaching full time in September. I can't say who we are looking at just yet, but



**MICHAEL
WOLCH**

JAZZ



Babs Asper, Edmund Dawe (centre) and Steve Kirby announce the new jazz professorship.

what I can tell you is that it will definitely be a blockbuster player."

He also said the program has previous funding from the university to hire at least two other full-time instructors on top of Gully and the Asper professor.

"We have pretty much signed up (saxophonist) Jimmy Greene to the program. He was very interested in what we had to offer when he was in town as a guest instructor, and it looks like he will be starting to teach here full time next year. And we have the funding to hire another professor, so hopefully by September next year we will have four new outstanding faculty members in the jazz program, who represent the front edge of jazz in the community."

Again, he stopped short of spilling the names of the other candidates, but he assured me that the instructors would definitely have some pedigree and bring more excitement to the already brimming jazz scene in town.

"We are going to be doing lots of recording, jamming and touring as a faculty band, and incorporating the students into these activities as we always do."

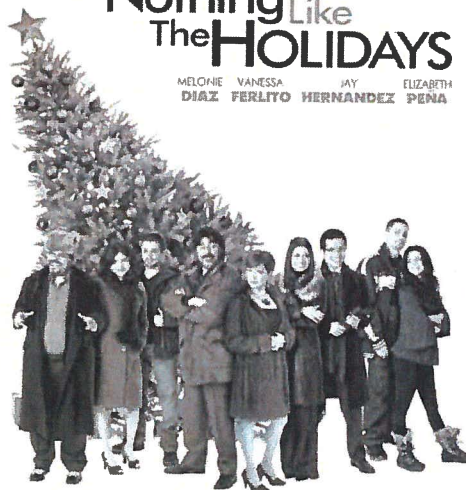
The new instructors will be moving to Winnipeg, so expect to see some new, and famous, faces around the usual jazz haunts. But they will also remain active in the international jazz scene and continue to tour and record with their old bandmates and anywhere else they are needed. Kirby stressed that it will be important for these musicians to be players and not just teachers.

"I want these guys to keep up their high level of playing and to keep mixing with the best players out there, and also to spread the word about our program, so, yes, they will be living mostly in Winnipeg, but there will be times when I have to cover their classes while they are off playing somewhere else."

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