

The Happiest Place on Earth Receives a High Note

On February 22, 2010, Weymouth High School Music Department returned home from Florida. Both the WHS Jazz Band and the WHS Chorus earned high ratings at the Disney Jazz Celebration held February 18-22 at Disney's Hollywood Studios in Orlando, Florida. It was more than judge's ratings that made this trip an educational success. It was more than your typical band festival where you have your scheduled time to play and then wait for the results. The experience level and expertise of the clinicians and adjudicators coupled with the professionalism and attention to detail of the Disney Youth Organizations made for a truly enjoyable time.

We arrived Tuesday evening via Orlando International Airport in time to be whisked over to BB King's Restaurant at the Pointe Orlando Mall. The Jazz Band and the Jazz Chorus were given 30 minutes each of play time on the stage. The performances were immediately streamed to the internet via a service they offer called livesync.com. This was really cool to be performing in an authentic blues club where they provided the top of line instruments, music stands etc..and on top of it all to have it broadcast live on the internet so their families at home could watch us. followed by an authentic New Orleans Buffett including fried pickles, which the kids loved. My stomach wasn't ready for that.

Wednesday was a park day. Thursday evening the students were greeted by the adjudicators and clinicians. Conn Selmer artists Dominick Farinacci, Saunders Sermons, Jared Schonig, and Jessy J performed two -one hour concerts over the weekend for the students and their families. More than 12 different schools from around the country attended the opening ceremony which filled the 1500 seat hall. We were treated to video archives of some the amazing performances which have taken place at Walt Disney World, and Disneyland including Louis Armstrong, Maureen McGovern, Ella Fitzgerald, Arturo Sandoval, and Count Basie to name a few.

After this we went back to the hotel for a brief rehearsal and a dip in the pool.

Our performance time was Friday AM for the Chorus and Friday PM for the Jazz band. Noted instrumental clinicians included; Dr. Willie Hill from UMASS Amherst, Dr. Fred Irby From Howard University, and Dr. Dee Spencer from San Fransisco University. Choral adjudicators included; Recording artists Jennifer Barnes, Conaitre Miller, as well as music arranger Dr. Steven Zegree.

On Saturday, our students were treated to workshops on their specific instrument/ voice with professional musicians such as; Chris Vadala (saxophonist for Chick Corea and Chuck Mangione) and Butch Miles (drummer for Count Basie) as well as Billboard Recording Artist Jessy J, and the aforementioned adjudicators. This was followed by the award ceremon where they first acknowledged the kids with a special Disney plaque and then a separate recognition for parents chaperones and directors. The directors were introduced to the main mouse himself!

I would highly recommend participating in the Disney Jazz Celebration. It was especially cool to be one of the first groups from Massachusetts to participate in the Jazz Celebration. The formula was well planned out. The price was within reach (after 9 months of fundraising.) The kids even enjoyed learning and became extremely motivated toward practicing the past two weeks since we have been back. Now don't get me wrong I love a good thrill ride--The Tower of Terror is just the thing to perk up a tired band director. However, after having such a positive experience with the organizers, clinicians etc.. on Saturday I found myself wanting to go back inside to the festival and take in more of this festive event. Despite the unusually cool weather for Florida, it was a hot weekend of musical performance, experience and instruction for the Weymouth High School Music Department.

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