

Roosevelt University Training Musicians For The Future

BY RUTH SZE

In the jazz program at the Roosevelt Chicago College of Performing Arts, the goal is not only to teach students how to play music technically, but also to prepare them to make a living as a musician. In 2008, Paul Wertico became head of jazz studies and introduced a combo program, where each semester, students engage in a different jazz-style combo. The combos include bebop, hard bop, ECM, fusion, avant-garde, Brazilian, and contemporary jazz.

Wertico was enthusiastic about the combo program because his desire was for students to graduate and truly be able to express themselves through music. He wanted to give each student an opportunity to engage in various styles throughout their education. "I've seen what's out there and what's hiring, and I want to give them the ability to think on their feet," Wertico explains. "Good musicians know how to go with the flow and make something out of nothing." With his own extensive experience as a musi-



Roosevelt University Jazz Orchestra performing live at the fall concert.



Improvisation and the ability to perform different styles of music is the main focus at Roosevelt University.

cian, he wants the students to have the same opportunities for success.

"This program is strong enough in focusing your time on specific areas of music so that in a semester you can honestly say you have a good grasp of the specific combo you were in," says jazz studies sophomore Nick Hagstrom. He adds that the setup of the program helps them feel more comfortable in different levels of the music business and prepares them for job opportunities.

Many of the faculty members in the program have had notable music careers and have extensive knowledge of the business. Faculty members include trumpeter Rob Parton, known for his Jazztech Big Band recordings; electric guitarist John McLean; lead-altoist of Frank Sinatra's, Mike Smith; and Latin artist Ruben Alvarez. Ryan Cunningham, 2008 graduate, recalls that many professors who were his mentors, helped him gain knowledge and an appreciation for music. "Most importantly," he adds, "All the professors are always available for extra help and care about your overall progress as a student, which makes such a difference when trying to survive the



The ability to think on their feet is a main concept in performance situations at Roosevelt.

busy life of a conservatory student." To get accepted in the program, applicants must go through auditions that begin the February before fall semester. Though previous grades will be reviewed, the audition is the main determining factor whether a student will be admitted or not. They must perform prepared pieces, sight read, and interact with a panel of faculty members. "I chose to study at CCPA because of the audition experience," recalls Cunningham. "I've had never had a more positive audition experience with such a welcoming and talented faculty and staff." Most graduates of the program remain involved in music. About forty

percent enroll in a graduate program for music, while another forty percent play gigs. Two thousand eight graduate Kevin Moore won an American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers award for one of his compositions. Cunningham, after taking a year off, plans to attend the New England Conservatory for a Masters of music in jazz composition. "My intention is to always play and create music, preferably while making a living in the music industry," he added. "Roosevelt has equipped me to work as a musician as well as having an excellent knowledge of the music industry and all its careers." ■CJM

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