

GRAMMY WINNER EDUCATES JAZZ STUDENTS

The Mercedes-Benz Amateur Jazz Competition, co-sponsored by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) and presented by Rick Monday and Bill Thissen from ICRT's The Morning Show, took place at Taipei American School's Guy Lott Auditorium on Sunday, October 5, 2008.

According to Rick Monday, the goal of the Amateur Jazz Competition was to "discover Taiwanese jazz musicians who represent Taiwan as Wang Chien-ming does." He provided that ICRT played a significant role in recognizing Taiwanese baseball players with great potential, which led to Wang Chien-ming's tryout and advancement to major league baseball with the New York Yankees.

"It is a big thing for ICRT to push sports, so why not with music? Due to Mercedes' grassroots support, in three years, Taiwan could be known world wide for its jazz musicians as well as its baseball players," said Rick Monday.

The competition involved four Taiwanese jazz combos, who each played three songs and were adjudicated by world-renowned jazz educator and Grammy Award recipient Dr. Gene Aitken.

"In the jazz world, everyone knows him," said Mr. Raymond Heberer, the sponsor of Tri-M Music Honor Society.

"Gene Aitken is respected around the world as a jazz educator. His comments will provide young Taiwanese jazz musicians the tools they need to achieve international success," said Rick Monday.

Also performing but not for award consideration was the TAS jazz combo.

Even though the event was a competition, it was in truth more of an "educational festival." Dr. Aitken went up to the stage and work with each jazz combo for fifteen minutes after their performance, which "allows both the band and the audience to learn more about jazz performance and appreciation," said Mr. Heberer.

"Ok, now, what has to happen in jazz music?" said Dr. Aitken to the first jazz group, ConSir Jazz Quintet.

"Make the music go some place. We call it the shaping of music... More energy, more sound! It makes all the difference in the world," he offered while making gestures to articulate his advices.

Reflecting on the critique session, Bill Thissen said, "The musicians learn a lot, as well as the 'lay men' [those who are not musicians]. Sometimes we hear some problems within the song but we cannot pinpoint them exactly. However, Dr. Aitken pinpointed all of them out when he worked with the musicians on-stage."

Furthermore, the overall atmosphere was very relaxing. The President of Tri-M Music Honor Society Annie Jeng (12) said, "I think the jazz musicians were really into the music. People who participated actually love music. They did not join to compete but because they had a passion."

Overall, even though there was only a small crowd on Sunday, everyone felt the experience was worthwhile. "Maybe this should happen more often... Even if some didn't win the competition, everybody gains a lot out of this experience. Everyone is going to leave here today a better musician," said Bill Thissen.

The drummer from Elin & Jay Duo remarked, "I think there should be more events like this to promote jazz to the public. This is a very positive experience. Dr. Gene Aitken has a very awesome method for adjudication. He approaches us from an ensemble perspective. So now we have a better idea on how to play in an ensemble."

Dr. Aitken also felt the Amateur Jazz Competition was a success. "It is a very positive educational festival. All groups listen to each other and make new friendships. We have a good crowd for the last performance from TAS. It is wonderful of TAS for opining the doors for this festival to happen."

He added, "It is a great privilege to work with the musicians on the stage. You see passion for jazz, a lot of talent, and a lot of creativity involved. And you see the younger generation is really excited to have a chance to perform, to express themselves, and to build confidence.

Last but not least, Dr. Aitken believes one of the most important skills the musicians gained was "to work as a team. When we leave school, it is to work with others, to develop something special because that is what we do in life. We are working towards a commitment with others."

The amateur musicians who attended the jazz competition will receive written and taped feedback from Dr. Aitken. The group who won first place received \$20,000NT and was invited to participate in the Tai-Chung Music Festival. The second, third, and fourth recipients received \$10,000NT, free meals at AlleyCats, and free meals at another restaurant, respectively.

by Irene P.

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