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Jazz expert to speak at MSU

By: Derek Wehrwein

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WHEN:2 p.m. today

WHERE:Halling Recital Hall - Free Admission

Minnesota State's Dr. Douglas Snapp credits Dr. Gene Aitken for helping create a new generation of jazz studies directors at universities across the nation.

He would know. He's one of them.

Snapp, the director of jazz studies at MSU, will get to meet the man he calls his mentor when Aitken gives a presentation at 2 p.m. today at the Performing Arts Center. Snapp knows Aitken from their days at the University of North Colorado in the early '90s, when Snapp was doing his doctoral work and serving as Aitken's assistant director of jazz studies.

"Even at that time he was quite an individual, traveling around the country doing clinics and workshops," Snapp said.

Aitken has done even more traveling since that time. He's been to China and various southeast Asian countries, and has served as the Director of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music in the National University of Singapore. He's appeared on ABC World News, worked with students in Iraq, conducted China's top military band and been involved in numerous other music-related projects.

Aitken will speak about some of those experiences today when he delivers a presentation on the development of western classical and jazz music in Asia and Iraq. This will be Aitken's second stop at MSU; about five years ago he came to the school briefly to work with jazz students.

"He's kind of a teacher's teacher," Snapp said. "His program teaches you how to run a college jazz program and you learn by being thrown into the fire."

The success of Aitken's program is evident in the number of directors who emerged from it, Snapp said. He indicated there are several directors of jazz studies at universities across the U.S. today that all came from Aitken's program. He reeled off several such examples in Minnesota alone, including directors at St. Cloud State, the University of Minnesota-Duluth and Winona State University.

Snapp said he's been able to stay in contact with Aitken even after Aitken left Northern Colorado in 2002.

"He had mentioned to me he was coming to the area so I thought, 'We need to have him speak here,'" said Snapp, who credited Aitken for his interest in new technology and willingness to travel abroad.

"Gene's the kind of guy who jumps into music technology and now he's gone off to Asia and is trying to bring western music to these schools in Asia," he said. "It was an opportunity when Gene was coming through, and the music department's goal was to make it a campus-wide event and not just for

music students."

Derek Wehrwein is the Reporter Variety Editor

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