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# Enthusiastic crowds met Aptos jazzmen on whirl through Europe

By BILL AKERS

When the musicians in the Aptos High School jazz band hit the road for a concert tour last month, they didn't go in for halfway measures. Their itinerary called for 12 concerts in 23 days and about 15,000 miles of travel by plane, train, boat and bus.

They learned that the life of a traveling musician can be exhausting, what with the succession of one-night stands, long bus rides between gigs and a succession of hotels that look alike.

But if it was exhausting, it was also exhilarating, for their travels took them through the heart of central Europe and they played in places like London, Paris, Brussels and Luxembourg, capping their tour with five concerts at the international jazz festival in Montreaux, Switzerland.

The band arrived home a week ago, tired and glad to be home, but with a store of memories that will last their lifetimes.

And how did the Europeans take to a group of high school kids going about the continent playing the music of Glenn Miller, Count Basie, Duke Ellington and the like?

"Everywhere we went they treated us like real celebrities," said Don Keller, the band's director. Perhaps the highest compliment on the band's ability came from the man who runs Belgium's biggest jazz club. It was after the group's first concert on the continent in Heist op den Berg, a little town on the outskirts of Brussels.

"The guy that ran the thing called us later and told us that he thought ours was the best band that had played there since 1954 when Duke Ellington was there."

Keller assessed the tour as "probably the busiest and most educational 23 days I've ever had." He also said that the group he took with him was "an exceptionally good band and they deserved the trip."

The 17 musicians and their eight chaperons left Oakland airport on June 30, traveling in a World Airways 747 jumbo jet to London. The trip cost \$23,000, a good portion put up by the students and their parents, but a lot of which was raised in the community.

Keller said the band played 50 concerts and dances to raise money for the trip, and clubs, organizations and individuals in the community also responded with generous donations to help the band on its way.

"How can I thank the community for all the backing we got?" Keller asked. "We can't thank them enough for their support."

And how did the young musicians hold up on the gruelling trip? "They know what it's like to be on the road, now," Keller said. There were some minor illnesses, such as the "turistas", and one boy missed a concert because of illness, but otherwise, everything went well. "Everything was well planned and it fell into place everyday."

At every concert the audiences "wouldn't let us go," Keller said. They demanded encores at every performance, the band responding with as many as three. "The longer they played, the better they got," the directors said admiringly of his band.

"These crazy goons just never tired out." The reception the band received from the audiences "was just fantastic," Keller declared. "They were really appreciative. It was unbelievable. I can't say enough for the audiences over there."

And, he added, "They respect jazz musicians over there a lot more than they do here in America."

The Aptos band traveled in company with two other bands, the one from the Arden Elementary School in Sacramento, and the other from Humber College in Toronto, Canada. The college band played something Keller called jazz rock, while the Aptos band stayed with traditional jazz music ranging "from Glenn Miller on up. They liked everything we played, it didn't matter what style."

The band was given a rapid introduction into the life on the road. After 14 hours in the plane from Oakland to London, they found they had a concert scheduled for the night of their arrival. "They played well considering how tired they were," he said, "but they were well enough prepared that even if they had a bad day it would be good."

After London they spent "a nice pleasant day" crossing the English channel to Ostend, where they picked up their buses and guides that would remain with them throughout the tour. The concert outside Brussels was their first on the continent.

They played a concert in a town square in Rotterdam, and another on the beach in a town on the North Sea called Katwijk aan Zee. There was time for sightseeing in Amsterdam and Cologne, Germany, and then on to Bonn where they played a concert in a market square.

"We played just around the corner from Beethoven's birthplace," Keller said. "That really is pretty heavy."

The bandstand was set up in a market place, he said, with seating in all the sidewalk cafes taken up and the standing room filled. "It was just fantastic. The buildings carried the sound like the town was wired for sound. The people were just great."

There was a boat trip up the Rhine where they saw the fabled castles ("And I got a taste of that German white wine") and then to Luxembourg where they played a concert in the town square.

If there was a disappointment on the trip, it was that the people who arranged it catered strictly to American tastes. They stayed in Holiday Inns and similar American-style hotels and were given mostly American-style food.

There was a long bus ride through France to Paris, where they played another concert, and then on to the jazz festival in Montreaux.

"That was our first taste of a European kind of hotel," he said. "And the food was tremendous. It was the best food we had on the trip."

At Montreaux they played five noontime concerts on the terrace of the Casino where the festival was held, and they played another night concert on the "night of the big bands." In between, they went to hear the jazz greats play and sing — people like Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, Cab Calloway and others. "The Kids loved it. They heard the best."

While in Montreaux the band made a recording for an album which will be released sometime in the future. "All it cost us was the price of the tape," he said. "That's the kind of treatment we got over there."

Assessing the trip, Keller said, "It was really worth it. We saw things and learned things you couldn't read out of a book. They (the band members) saw those things and they will be a part of them from now on."

And as for the reception they were given, "I just can't say enough for the audiences over there. They were really appreciative. It was unbelievable."