

Aptos High Musicians Eye Europe

By TOM HONIG

Sentinel Staff Writer

Aptos High School at break time is a joy to behold.

The students, suddenly released from the shackles of class, are exuberant with everything life suddenly has to offer: walking, talking, joking, flirting, eating and pitching pennies at corridor walls. Those lucky enough to be on the inside of a circle of friends know the security of companionship, and their faces glow with the knowledge that they belong.

But perhaps the most interesting group of students are nowhere to be found during morning breaks at the high school; they're too busy rehearsing for a trip to Europe this summer.

They make up the Aptos High School Jazz Ensemble, a group of 17 musicians who, if everything goes right, are headed for a summer tour of Europe culminated by an appearance at the renowned Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland.

The musical director, sometimes called their teacher, is Don Keller, a soft-spoken man who speaks loudly in his praise of the jazz ensemble.

Earlier this week, Keller gave his students a 10-minute break so he could talk about them, their upcoming trip and their music.

The Aptos High jazz group will actually be representing the entire state during its tour. It was selected for the honor by John Carrico, president of the Reno-based Jazz International Incorporated, sponsors of the yearly Reno International Jazz Festival. Aptos has finished in the money every year it has gone to the festival — 1973 through 1976 — so Carrico honored the perennial finalists with the chance to tour Europe. There is one catch here, however; the band must raise money on its own.

Keller said that the students, their parents and friends will be raising that money in a variety of ways, but that has nothing to do with the issue at hand — the band and its music.

"The band plays, more or less, the history of big band music — starting with Basie, Les Brown and Woody Herman all the way through to Stan Kenton and Maynard Ferguson."

His conversation was interrupted at that point by the topic of his discussion: the band started to play.

He went on talking, but my mouth dropped open as I re-

membered the miniscule chance that any high school companion of mine would have done anything without the teacher telling him to.

"Do you mean that they start rehearsing even when you don't tell them to?"

"Sure," he said in a rather off-handed way. "They are not just shucking and jiving; they are very serious."

To illustrate his point, he said that he is nominating seven members of the band for state honors. For a school the size of Aptos High, it would be almost ludicrous to expect that even one person would be eligible for such honors. "Any of the seven could easily qualify," he said. "This group is just exceptional."

We had been talking out in the corridor, so we went back into the band room to hear the sounds. The band was swinging, and an untrained ear uncovered no mistakes (although Keller found a low point or two).

The music they played is sophisticated, big band jazz. "If you haven't heard them before, they're going to blow you out," Keller had warned me, and he was right.

With the ensemble swinging, it wasn't hard to close your eyes and imagine a well-dressed band swinging before an appreciative audience at a big-time jazz festival.

Come summer, you won't have to imagine.

Members of the band include Keith Wilson, piano and vibes; Jeff Howells, bass; Bob Bossham and Doug Sakae, drums; Vic Milianti, guitar; Rebecca Franks, Jacinto Diego, Jenny Stoik and Mark Finn, trumpets; Linda Oleson, Brandon Mathew and Jeff Wendt, trombones; Brian Emmons and Michelle Hinton, tenor saxophones; Kim Keller and Sherry Harlan, alto saxophones, and Julie Nordgren, baritone sax.



Trombone player Linda Oleson is all concentration as she plays along with 16 other musicians during a recent rehearsal of the Aptos High Jazz Ensemble, bound for Europe this summer.

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