



a smooth

The UNC Jazz Studies Program builds a reputation as one of the country's best.



By Jason Webb '97, '06

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIK STENBAKKEN

Jazz.

For many, the word has numerous connotations. It's the essence of cool. It's a form of art or a living thing. People think of Charlie Parker, Thelonius Monk and Miles Davis. More and more, people studying jazz are think-

ing of the University of Northern Colorado. In the past few years alone, the program has won several presti-

Pictured from left are students Dustin Drews, John Thomas, Matt Roehrich and Toshi Chun playing with the UNC Jazz Lab Band I.

gious awards, including *Down Beat* magazine awards for 2007 Outstanding Performance, 2006 Best College Big Band and 2005 Best College Jazz Band.

It all started in 1965 when James Miller, the interim director of the School of Music, asked one of the school's newest faculty members, Buddy Baker, to start a large jazz ensemble—a dance band. By 1967, the second ensemble formed, and just six years later, the new UNC jazz program took off, beginning its long-running tradition of national recognition.

In 1976, Gene Aitken became the university's first director of Jazz Studies. Along with Aitken, an additional

Pictured below are students Steve Koval-check on jazz guitar and Christopher Hahn on trumpet; opposite are Christopher Hahn and Josh Prewett of the brass section and Reagan Mitchell on upright bass.



three part-time jazz instructors were brought aboard, and as the faculty grew, so did the number of ensembles the program showcases. Today, there are five big bands, three vocal jazz groups and various combos. During Aitken's run as the director, UNC's Jazz Studies Program brought in nearly 150 individual and group awards as well as prestigious invitations to showcase UNC talent. One of those awards went to Dana Landry (MM-94) for solo performance on piano when he was a student at UNC. Landry is now the director of

"THE STUDENTS HERE TEND TO BE OF A CERTAIN VARIETY. THEY HAVE A GOOD ATTITUDE. THEY HAVE A GOOD WORK ETHIC. THEY HAVE *Camaraderie.*"

—Dana Landry

Jazz Studies at UNC, taking the job in 2002. From his time as a student to his present role with the university, Landry has seen some change.

"Any time there are new people in a program, there's bound to be change. I think we're running with tradition, however. We're not forgetting the past,"

Landry says. If winning awards is still part of that tradition, then Landry has kept it going. In the five years under his guidance, the program has won seven awards, indicating that the program continues to be headed in the right direction.

The biggest change is adding the degrees of bachelor of music in jazz studies and master of music in jazz studies. One would expect a school that *U.S. News and World Report* named one of the top five jazz programs in the nation in 1997 to already have those degrees, but until recently, it didn't.

When one asks the Associate Director of Jazz Studies Dave Stamps, who has a master's degree in both jazz studies and jazz composition, what makes this program so strong, he doesn't hesitate: "It's the wide variety of things that are offered here, and people are drawn to the history of the program," Stamps says.

Landry, who has a bachelor of music from Berklee College of Music and a master of music from UNC, believes the program's strength also comes from the people involved. From the past faculty to the current faculty, each person has helped shape Jazz Studies into what it is today. In addition, Landry says the students play a major role in the character of the program. "The students here tend to be of a certain variety. They have a good attitude. They have a good work ethic. They have camaraderie. It's a positive, competitive attitude and not cutthroat," he says. Stamps echoes the sentiment that the students are a vital component of the program and points out that many of the alumni are teaching and

UNC's Jazz Press Provides Music to Many

AMONG UNC'S JAZZ PROGRAM'S STRENGTHS is something not many schools can boast—a fully functioning/publishing arm. In fact, the UNC Jazz Press is one of the largest jazz presses in the world.

"We have 3,000 titles in our catalog by about 400 composers," says Dave Stamps, the associate director of Jazz Studies. Those titles are available for college, high school and middle school jazz ensembles to purchase for use in performances. "Another way UNC's Jazz Studies is recognized is through the press," Stamps says. "When people order a chart, they see that it comes from UNC."

Not only does the Jazz Press publish music for bands to perform, but it also publishes some of the school's own recorded performances. The most recent is from Lab Band 1, titled "Here in the Now," a collection of nine songs sent to *Down Beat* magazine for award consideration.

To order a copy of "Here in the Now," contact the Jazz Press at 970.351.2577.

Jazz Festival Set to Swing in April

ON APRIL 23, 2008, the Greeley/UNC Jazz Festival takes center stage for the 38th time, as several impressive performers come to town to give educational clinics and outstanding performances. "We have some huge names coming this year," says Dave Stamps, the associate director of Jazz Studies. Among those names are three National Endowment of the Arts Jazz Masters: Jim Hall, Ron Carter and Slide Hampton. Each of the three will give performances open to the public. The festival usually brings more than 3,000 people to the daily clinics and evening concerts. Among those attending are middle school, high school and college jazz ensembles.

APRIL 23 The festival kicks off at various downtown Greeley venues.

APRIL 24 The main-stage performances begin. The vocal night features Take 6 and Northern Colorado Voices at the Union Colony Civic Center.

APRIL 25 Ron Carter/Jim Hall Duo, and Slide Hampton with the UNC Lab Band 1.

APRIL 26 Chris Potter's Underground and the Festival All-Stars under the direction of Gene Aitken.

For further information on the UNC/Greeley Jazz Festival, visit www.arts.unco.edu/uncjazz

performing. "Everybody is in the same boat. They're here together. They're not only musicians, they're also friends," Landry adds.

Sit down and talk with one of the 35 Jazz Studies majors or 125 musicians involved in the program, and similar comments about the program emerge. Steve Denny is a second-year graduate student at UNC. He is working toward his master of music in jazz studies. "The attitude is different. It's less competitive, and there's friendship and goodwill," says Denny, a pianist in Lab Band 2 and Combo 3.

Denny also says the teaching abilities of the faculty distinguish the jazz program. But one of the major reasons he feels the program ex-

ties prior to UNC, also sees the program differently than others might. While attending Florida State University, Mitchell was one of 1,400 music majors. It was a place where he felt lost in the shuffle, but that's not so with UNC. "It's just big enough to get many points of view, but small enough to get one-on-one time with the faculty," Mitchell says.

Lastly, Mitchell, a saxophone player in Lab Band 1, believes the rest of the music majors have shaped the program into something extraordinary. "The last thing you need to be doing is fighting with another musician," he

**"THERE'S A VERY Positive Vibe
BETWEEN THE STUDENTS AND THE FACULTY."**

—Reagan Mitchell, graduate student

cells is the opportunities presented. "There's a lot to do in the program at all levels, whether undergraduate or graduate," Denny says. "A musician has a lot of chances to play."

A graduate student working toward his master's in jazz studies, Reagan Mitchell believes the program gets its strength from three key components. "On top of having an amazing faculty, there's a very positive vibe between the students and the faculty," he says. Mitchell, who attended larger universi-

says. "The relationships I've built here will be golden later on in my career." Even though the program can seem demanding, the benefits more than outweigh any potential negative. "What you're learning is always so positive, you sometimes forget about all the hard work," says Mitchell. And that is the essence of smooth jazz. **NV**

