

The Newsletter of the Campolindo Instrumental Music Program

Brought to you by Campo Instrumental Music Boosters

FROM THE PODIUM

by Johnny Johnson, Music Director

Once again, we've reached that critical midpoint of the school year. It's a time when we've made significant progress from where we started and yet have many great leaps forward to make before the end of the year.

This has been a year of experimentation in terms of our performance calendar. Changes in the Academic School Year Calendar essentially shortened the first semester and the early August start moved up the dates of our key performances. So, here we are on February 6 already enjoying our Winter Concert, an event that normally takes place later in the month. We also took this opportunity to make another change. We have combined the two Winter Concerts—formerly scheduled as separate Band and Orchestra events—into one night. We hope this change will further unite the work of the two facets of our program and provide a larger audience to witness the wonderful progress of our performing groups.

An added benefit of combining the Winter Concerts into one was that it provided space in the calendar to bring back the Chamber Concert. What a delight it was for me to sit back and watch Masters of Ceremonies, Katie Ye and Russell Bradley, present eleven chamber groups in a formal concert setting. Chamber music has always been an important ingredient in our program but I was very happy to see it showcased beyond our in-class performances during semester finals. Bravo to the chamber group performers!

For the Symphonic Band, last week was one of growth and new perspective. We were privileged to host Dr. Robert Halseth as our clinician for a two day mini-residency. Dr. Halseth is the Professor of Music and Director of Bands Emeritus for California State University, Sacramento, and the current conductor of the Sierra Nevada Winds. I had the privilege of studying with Dr. Halseth while working on my

master of music degree in conducting. I've always been grateful for the example he provided to me for how to work effectively with an ensemble. His charm and understanding of human nature are equal to his amazing conducting skills and rehearsal technique. It was a pleasure to watch him work his magic in collaboration with Campo musicians.

Dr. Halseth's visit was an excellent preparatory step for our planned tour in Southern California in March. We will join Palm Desert High School for a joint concert, enjoy a rehearsal exchange with Cathedral City High School, receive clinics from conductors at Cerritos College and CSU, Long Beach. We will also participate in the Disney Performing Arts Soundtrack Session as well as attending a concert of the LA Philharmonic. With sightseeing and lots of time for camaraderie, this tour is sure to create many lifetime memories.

It's a tradition for Campolindo Instrumental Music to be well-represented in the Contra Costa County Honor Band. Congratulations are in order for the 2020 participants who were selected to participate in this year's amazing CCCHB experience: Natalie Mangoba, flute (junior); Henrik Barck, flute (sophomore); Amelia Graves, flute (sophomore); Soumili Mukherjee, FIRST CHAIR bassoon (sophomore); Emily Marston, clarinet (senior); Antonio Thomas, tenor saxophone (junior); Corbin Strong, FIRST CHAIR trumpet (junior); Lilly Thies, trumpet (sophomore); Amrita Malhotra, French horn (sophomore); Connor Johnson, trombone (junior); Calvin Chen, trombone (freshman); Russell Bradley, FIRST CHAIR (for the third year in a row!) euphonium (senior).

Each year, thousands of students from across the entire state of California audition for placement in one of several All-State performing ensembles. Only 300 are seated in three All-State Bands. This year, we have two "All-Staters" who will travel to Fresno for the California All-State Music Education Conference (CASMEC). Congratulations to Soumili Mukherjee,

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"From the Podium" (continued from page 1)

who secured a seat in the top group, the 80-member All-State Wind Symphony, on bassoon, and Amrita Malhotra, who secured a seat in the second group, the 100-member All-State Symphonic Band, on French horn. I can't wait to see and hear them on stage as they enjoy this exceptional honor.

On the orchestra side, we continue to benefit from weekly sessions with Jeremy Cohen. As a director, it's impossible for me to understand all of the fine techniques that go into getting the most from every single instrument. Mr. Cohen's string expertise has become an essential part of our string program and has revolutionized our level of mastery, as well as adding critical details to our range of technique and style. I especially appreciate the synergy and partnership that Jeremy and I have developed. It's truly magical and a wonder to see our string players blossom under this piece of our program.

Even as we've spent many hours preparing for the Winter Concert, much preparation is underway for our annual Jazz Dinner Dance, taking place this



Saturday, February 8, from 6:00-10:00 p.m. This is the principal event for our jazz musicians, allowing them to showcase their talent as a big band and in various smaller combos. It's a fun night of food, dancing, and music that makes a great Valentine's celebration for couples. We hope to see some of you there! I should also mention that two of our jazz musicians are members of this year's East Bay Jazz All-Stars. Congratulations to Antonio Thomas (junior), tenor saxophone and Connor Johnson (junior), trombone.

On the list of changes this year are two new instrumental music teachers hired in the Moraga School District. I'm encouraged about what these new teachers are bringing to our programs. As we approached January, it became clear that they needed time and space to find their niche and make improvements in their programs. We made the important decision to cancel the annual Moraga Area Concerts that we've enjoyed in previous years to make room for activities that would better serve those teachers and their students for this year. We expect to bring the Moraga Area Concerts back next year. Meanwhile, if you're in a position to support these teachers in their efforts, please do so. The future looks bright.

As always, we are indebted to our Instrumental Music Boosters for providing the funds needed to keep our programs moving forward. We depend upon it and thrive because of it. Thank you most sincerely!



Johnny Johnson's Story

by Stacy Giglio, reprinted from our Winter 2016 edition

We've all seen Johnny Johnson on the podium during concerts, and marveled at the performances he is able to create with our instrumental music ensembles. Our students spend time with him each day, but few of us know Mr. Johnson's story. I had the opportunity to sit with Johnny and hear about his journey from the Louisiana bayou to California, and I'd like to share his inspiring story with you.

Johnny's path to teaching music was winding, and filled with seemingly unrelated adventures along the way. He did not know when he graduated from high school that he wanted to teach music. In fact, his life was void of music for years at a time. But in hindsight, each experience fit perfectly into the next, and by listening to his mentors and following his interests, Johnny ultimately pursued his passions.

If Johnny could tell his Campo music seniors one lesson he has learned so far, he says he would tell them, "Life is meandering at best. You never know where it will take you. ... You're going to do what you need to do, and you'll find ways to do it. It's all just a process. Don't be rigid. This isn't the end—it's never the end."

Johnny Johnson grew up "down the bayou" in a little town 90 miles southwest of New Orleans called Galliano (pronounced "guy a no" by the locals). The town had two roads, one on each side of the bayou, and Johnny lived there with his parents and younger brother until the last two weeks of first grade when he moved to Westlake, where he remained until graduation. Johnny remembers being teased about his strong Cajun accent by the Westlake kids who had more "twangy" Texan-style accents.

For fun, Johnny and his brother Jeffry like to bowl. The boys' grandma ("maw-maw") taught them to bowl back on the bayou, and the boys were partners in a youth bowling league.

Johnny didn't grow up in a particularly musical family. His mother played flute and his uncle played bass drum, but it wasn't until 6th grade that Johnny picked his first instrument, the alto sax. It was "okay," but when



his teacher asked him to play the baritone sax (because there were too many altos) he knew he had found his instrument. Johnny plays the baritone sax today and still has the first one he bought with his grandma's help.

Marching bands are popular in Louisiana, and Johnny was the drum major for his high school marching band. (In asking about his high school years, I also found out that Johnny was the Valedictorian of his class!)

While he enjoyed leadership and making music, he couldn't wait to get out of small-town Louisiana, and started taking college classes in the summer to broaden his horizons.

It was his summer computer science class at Louisiana Tech that led Johnny to major in Computer Science in college. Johnny "loved gadgets," and he enjoyed "the creative aspect of programming," at least initially. Then came a critical day that would change Johnny's life.

He was working in the computer lab at Louisiana Tech during a bad rain storm when there was a power outage. His monitor went blank, and all of his work was gone. Johnny remembers "looking in the monitor screen and seeing a miserable person staring back." He told himself, "I can't do this anymore."

Feeling lost, Johnny went home after the quarter, on "a quest for what I wanted to do in life." He went to a McNeese State football game while on break, and he says the band at half time blew his socks off. He realized that he was missing music in his life.

Looking for guidance, Johnny went to see his childhood piano teacher, Lisa Bustle, and told her about his quest. She told Johnny, "You need to teach! You loved music as a kid. Go study music education." Johnny described this to me as, "She was saving my life, and I knew it."

Taking his mentor's advice, Johnny enrolled in McNeese State University where he majored in Music Education, with a second emphasis in Music Composition. He joined the symphonic band, then the wind ensemble, and auditioned for and made drum major his second year. Johnny was immersed in music. He

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practiced at least two hours a day and took every class he could take, with Composition and Theory being his favorites.

During this time, the conductor for the wind ensemble retired, and a new one arrived. His name was Harvey Benstein. Johnny remembers that Harvey was “tough” but that the ensemble “started playing well really quickly” after Mr. Benstein arrived. Johnny had to work really hard “to be good.”

Johnny’s first teaching job was at a high school in New Orleans with a struggling music program. It was there he met his wife Danelle who was teaching choir and speech. Sharing a classroom and an office, Johnny and Danelle grew the music program from 30 students to 120 students in four years, but while “firing on all cylinders,” they burned out. They quit and moved to Orlando, Florida.

In Florida, Danelle began working for Disney while the couple started their own business, creating worksheets and lesson plans for high school speech classes, which they sold to teachers and schools across the country for four years. Johnny also worked for a computer rental company during this time, setting up equipment for conventions and shows.

During his free time, Johnny composed music. He and Danelle began holding chamber concerts once a

month where they would invite their friends over, cook them dinner, and then perform Johnny’s music. Danelle would sing and Johnny would play saxophone or piano, and it became one of their favorite activities.

Then another “moment of clarity” (as he calls them) occurred for Johnny. He and Danelle attended a local high school Christmas concert. “The teacher was so bad,” remembers Johnny. “The stage was full of talent, but they were completely mediocre. It could have been electrifying.” It had been eight years since Johnny conducted. He realized his “soul was drying up a bit.” He needed to go back to teaching music and decided to get his masters degree.

Johnny contacted Harvey Bernstein (who was now teaching at Campolindo) who suggested Johnny study someplace where he would want to live and work. Harvey gave him the names of directors of five masters degree programs in California, and Johnny opted for a Master of Music in Conducting at Sacramento State, studying with Dr. Robert Halseth. So Johnny and Danelle moved to California.

After graduating from Sac State, Johnny landed the job at College Park in Pleasant Hill. After six years, he was “pink slipped” for the third time so the couple went to Porter High School in Houston, Texas, where Johnny’s old high school teacher, now serving as Associate

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Superintendent, said they needed new band and choir teachers and a new string program. Danelle and Johnny loved the work, but not Texas. When Harvey Benstein called two years later and asked Johnny if he would be interested in interviewing for his job at Campolindo when he retired at end of the year, Johnny jumped at the opportunity. Johnny was one of several candidates who interviewed. He got the job! So, it was back to California and the rest is history.

Looking back, it was relationships with mentors, and also the ability to listen to his soul, that helped Johnny pursue his dreams. Johnny thanks his piano teacher, Miss Bustle; Harvey Benstein; and several “moments of clarity” along the way for shaping his journey and helping him stay true to his passions.

UPCOMING PERFORMANCES

Unless otherwise noted, events will be held at the CPAC (Campolindo Performing Arts Center).

Thursday, February 6, 2020, 7:30-9:00 PM

Winter Concert — ALL STUDENTS MUST ATTEND
Open to the public; please invite friends and family

Saturday, February 8, 2020, 6:00-10:00 PM

Jazz Dinner Dance at the Moraga Country Club for those who bought tickets.

Thursday, April 30, 2020, 7:30-9:00 PM

Spring Concert 1 (Orchestra and Jazz)
ALL STUDENTS MUST ATTEND
Open to the public; please invite friends and family

Friday, May 1, 2020, 7:30-9:00 PM

Spring Concert 2 (Concert and Symphonic Bands)
ALL STUDENTS MUST ATTEND
Open to the public; please invite friends and family

Friday, May 8, 2020, 6:00-10:00 PM

Jazz Café at Stanley Middle School
Ticket info to be announced closer to the event.

The full event calendar for 2019-2020 is available on our website:

www.campomusic.org/upcoming-events

Thank you to Vadim Mikulinsky for the photos from the Fall Concert that are included in this issue.

See more photos in our online gallery:
www.campomusic.org/gallery-2

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