

Tritone Jazz Fantasy Camp: Dreams So Real

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to play jazz. But this hasn't hurt Kevin Miller, an engineer who works on Global Positioning Systems for NASA in La Canada, Calif. Miller, who plays fretless bass, traveled across the country to attend the Tritone Jazz Fantasy Camp at Nazareth College in Rochester, N.Y., last June. On the camp's first evening Miller could be found chatting with flutist/guitarist Vivien Bonazzi, a Human Genome Project scientist, from Rockville, Md., and Don Levine, a guidance counselor/drummer from New York City. But science, engineering and psychology were not part of the conversation. The "fantasy" here involved putting careers aside for a week and indulging in nothing but jazz.

"The best thing has been the ability to play all the time," Miller said.

"The faculty takes you out of the box and up a couple of notches," said Levine, a camp veteran. "It changes you as a musician and as a person, too. You're here for a week but you think about it for a year."

"It's been a blast," Bonazzi said. "The faculty really lets you lose your inhibitions. Your fingers want to go where they're used to going. The teachers show you where you could and should go."

Now in its fifth year, the Tritone camp is the brainchild of bassist Bob DeRosa. After enjoying a jazz camp at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pa., DeRosa teamed up with big band director/arranger Fred Sturm and jazz educator/saxophonist Jim Doser and started his own. (Tritone runs a second camp through Lawrence University every summer on Lake Michigan in Baileys Harbor, Wis.). The camp's faculty/student ratio favors the attendees with eight full-time and three part-time faculty for 38 students.

"The quality of the faculty here is extraordinary," said Don Copley, a cardiologist/baritone saxophone player from Buffalo. Any doubts about that were dispelled at the first evening's faculty concert. Faculty members wasted no time getting down to business.

"One of the things we try to do is demystify improvisation," said Doser before the group tackled "Bluesette." He proceeded to demonstrate the use of a guide-note, showing how these notes



KEVIN MILLER (LEFT) AND JIM DOSER



BARITONE SAXOPHONIST DON COPLEY

could be embellished in succeeding choruses. Before playing "All The Things You Are," guitarist Gene Bertoncini showed how the melody notes in the tune are based on thirds and fourths. He suggested using them as guide-notes, perhaps employing ascending or descending lines.

Copley, who has attended two other jazz camps, says Tritone's is the most intimate. "There's more attention to individuals, even in the big band," he said. At the finale small-group concert, the nine-piece small-group under Bertoncini performed Copley's original tune "Latin Satin." "I had no way to imagine it sounding so good," Copley said. "Each soloist brought stuff to the tune I never would have imagined."
—Ron Netsky