

Jump Jive & Wail

Musicians jam, improv during big band night

By Jason Hardy

Staff writer

For the past 15 years, Monday nights have been very special for a lot of Lincoln musicians.

Monday Night Big Band has become a tradition in Lincoln as well as other cities around the country. Tonight, the tradition continues in the form of Monday Night Jazz at P.O. Pears, 322 S. Ninth St.

It's an event that has helped many musicians and spectators gain first-hand experience about jazz and big band music.

"We use it as a tool to hone our skills, and obviously we use some of the proceeds to buy new music so we get an opportunity to explore music from new composers," said Dutch Ode, a member of the office at Arts Incorporated, the group that helps organize Monday Night Big Band.

Ode said the dynamic of the performances is very free-spirited because the members of the group vary every Monday night and often include people in the audience.

Not only that, the music is all sight read, and the players are given a lot of freedom to experiment.

"It keeps it fresh," he said. "It allows some of us to direct on a regular basis. It allows us to play extended solos that we wouldn't be allowed to play in other public settings with musical constraints."

He said the band members are of all ages — both high school students and retired professionals are common — and the directors change week to week.

"It's really a bridge between the amateur and professional ranks," he said. "There are a number of young jazz players that have got an awful lot of jazz

experience with us and have moved up to doing professional performances and have gone on to college for music."

Dean Haist, the director for tonight's performance, said the spontaneous nature of Monday Night Jazz not only made for an educational performance but a challenging one as well.

"It's also been an opportunity for older musicians who play a lot professionally to play big band music and have some fun with it," Haist said. "It does present a challenge though, depending on who's available (to play) because some music is easier to play than others."

"When we get together and sight read the music, some have seen it and some haven't, but that's what makes it fun and a challenge."

Ode said each director decides what music to play, so there is never a set song list.

"Sometimes you hear some artistic and adventurous pieces, but then we might follow it up with a standard from the big band repertoire," he said. "So it really varies back and forth between new and old."

Haist said the wide variety of musical styles in Monday Night Jazz keeps each performance fresh, which in turn has kept audiences coming back for more.

"They get a chance to hear a lot of different individuals do solos," he said. "I notice that, depending on who's playing, different people will come out. Especially if there's a high school student playing, a lot of their friends will come down, too."

Ode, who usually plays twice a month, said the group had performances scheduled at P.O. Pears every Monday night through the end of February, but promised the music wouldn't stop there.

"This is expected to go on almost indefinitely," he said.

Delon Lonowski/DN

PREVIEW Monday Night Big Band

WHERE: P.O. Pears, 322 S. Ninth St.

WHEN: every Monday night through February

COST: \$4 for adults,

\$3 for students

THE SKINNY: Improv jazz and big band make for new music experience.