

# Ben Roseth Heads East

## Garfield standout tackles the perils of a jazz future

BY TODD MATTHEWS

If you are a member of the Garfield High School Jazz Band, praise and accolades are par for the course. Last May, the group received top honors at the 2003 Essentially Ellington at Lincoln Center (the previous year, the group finished in second place). The band also received First Place honors at the Bellevue Jazz Festival, and Best Band honors at the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival (in addition to four soloist awards). While performing at the Essentially Ellington competition, the group was invited to perform on the NBC Today show.

If you are a member of the Garfield High School Jazz Band, moments of magic are also par for the course. At a recent Sunday afternoon performance at the Seward Park Amphitheater, that magic continued. While the school's C Group of students (freshman and sophomore students, mostly) were tuning their instruments, a bald eagle circled overhead, checking out the scene. As one student pointed the creature out to the crowd, the bird found a perch at the east end of the amphitheater and, along with the approximately 200 people in attendance, was treated to an afternoon of jazz by the finest high school jazz band in the nation.

Alto saxophonist Ben Roseth, a member of the Garfield High School band, knows first-hand about the moments of praise and magic that seems to follow this group. Case in point: the group's performance with Wynton Marsalis at this year's Lincoln Center competition. "When [Wynton] played with us, he left it all on the stage," recalls Roseth. "It was one of the most incredible performances that I had ever seen. Everyone knew, as soon as it was over, that they had just witnessed something magical."

Indeed, the Essentially Ellington performance was a memorable denouement for a young man who began playing music in the third grade, and graduated from high school last month. During that period, Roseth has managed to establish

a career (can a teenager, just out of high school, have a career? If so, Roseth has one) that has spanned jazz clubs (he has performed with Jay Thomas's big band for the past three years), performance halls (last month he was invited by the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra as a featured soloist during its Stan Kenton tribute



concert at Benaroya Hall), and road trips (this month Roseth and his classmates will tour Europe).

"The entire Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra enjoys how Ben plays, and has been watching his musical growth with great interest," says Michael Brockman, Executive Director and Artistic Co-Director at the SRJO. "There are many young players around the area with lots of technique, but Ben is exceptional in his ability to mold his playing to match the style of whatever music he is asked to play. It shows a genuine regard for the history of jazz. I have heard him play very old and very

new music, and in each case, his style has been just what was needed to make the performance convincing and musical. He represents exactly what we want to support—great home grown talent that can hold its own across the nation."

Jazz big band leader Jay Thomas is more blunt: "I think he is a great young player and a fine specimen of human being also-kind of a total package!"

An interest in music developed early for Roseth. In the third grade, a gym teacher (and part-time jazz guitarist) inspired him at Graham Hill Elementary school. Roseth's parents took their son to his teacher's performance at the Still Life In Fremont, and the young man was hooked on music. "My parents had always listened to jazz," he recalls, "The music was in the house. That night, though, it was a Coltrane retrospective, with Dan Greenblatt and Rick Mandyck. Even though I was in the third grade, I felt connected and inspired. I came home and said, 'I want to play the saxophone.'"

Roseth went on to study privately with Greenblatt for nine years. Exploring the likes of Cannonball Adderley ("I've always tried to copy his sound and his phrasing. I've never really succeeded. It's kind of intangible. Its soulful. His music touches me. I can't really explain it beyond that") and Kenny Garrett ("He's my number one modern jazz musician") also fueled Roseth's interest.

At Washington Middle School, he studied with the award-winning music director Bob Knatt. At Garfield High School, he studied under the direction of long-time music director Clarence Acox. "At both of those places," Roseth says, "I have been lucky enough to be exposed to teachers who know what they are after, provide experience, and have unique methods. Mr. Knatt demanded much of the students in order to achieve perfection. He set standards and wouldn't let go. Acox is someone who has personified Seattle jazz for the

past thirty-something years. I don't know how he does it, but everything he says or does is a calculated move for our benefit. He places people on songs, and solos to different soloists. Each of the soloists has different personalities. Somehow he knows just what songs will bring out the best in those personalities."

It was Acox who directed Roseth and the Garfield High School band toward higher aspirations: namely, Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City. Roseth was a part of that experience during his freshman, junior and senior years. Talking about those years competing in the spotlight, Roseth is enthusiastic. "Essentially Ellington' is the most well-run jazz festival in the country," he raves. "They maximize the experience for the students. They have a large budget, the staff is happy when helping us-it's a combination of the staff at Lincoln Center, Wynton's artistic vision, and the location. New York City is an inspiring place in itself. Being on stage at Avery Fisher . . . a packed house with Wynton Marsalis . . . it was incredible."

In the Fall, Roseth will be headed to Boston. He will attend Tufts University and the New England Conservatory of Music-studying jazz saxophone with Jerry Bergonzi. "I don't really know what to expect," he says. "I've seen some of [Bergonzi's] books, and they are pretty amazing. I'm not sure what the jazz scene is like there. A lot of contemporary things are going on, and I want to investigate that. As far as genres of music? I want to soak up whatever the scene has to offer."

But before moving to the East Coast, Roseth will hit the road with his high school peers. The Garfield High School Jazz Band will be touring Europe July 2nd through July 16th, making appearances in Paris, Montreux and The Hague.

National competitions . . . local jazz clubs . . . academic settings-Roseth is unfazed. "It's all pretty much the same," he says. "It's all music and I like it all. What I try to focus on is the quality of the music. I don't get tripped up on the location. If it's Lincoln Center or the Garfield High School Band room-I'm just trying to make the music happen."

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