

Navigation: [Home](#) >> Article: Jazz Singer Excites PCC

Jazz Singer Excites PCC

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PCC showcased a jazz concert at Harbeson Hall Saturday night as part of the Faculty Artist Concert series. It was an entertaining experience even for those who are not into jazz.

The atmosphere was cozy and charming. The stage was filled with a warm red light. The musicians' darker clothing contrasted the singer's shiny blond hair. The hall was filled with music enthusiasts whose eyes were glued to the performers. Musical jazz talent, Andrea Baker, was the highlight of the evening. The critically acclaimed vocalist is also the director of Jazz Studies at PCC, where she heads up a large and diversified department.

It was her first jazz concert at Harbeson Hall. "It is really exciting to see this art form continue to capture the hearts and minds of folks all over the world. And to think that it all started in our little corner of the world makes me especially proud to be an American," she said.

Baker is a multi-instrumentalist. Jazz critic, Leonard Feather, has compared her to Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. Jazz Improv Magazine called her a female Sinatra.

In 2005, Baker was inducted to the prestigious Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame for her many jazz endeavors.

Mario Acaves, who takes piano lessons at PCC on Saturdays, praised the presentation. He was filled with emotions as he listened to Baker's smooth voice. When asked what he thought of the performance, he said, "I love it a lot. I love jazz. I love the tone of her voice."

Art student, Tania Jolley, admittedly smiled through the songs about love. Looking back from her

seat, she saw she was not the only one smiling in the audience.

For Saturday's performance, pianist John Hammond, bassist Jim Hughart and drummer Ralph Penland accompanied Baker – all of whom are jazz icons in the Los Angeles area.

Hammond is a native Texan and a graduate of The Houston Conservatory of Music. After relocating to Los Angeles in 1968, Hammond seamlessly transitioned into the West Coast jazz scene and became a first call studio player. He has performed or recorded with artists ranging from Joe Williams and Sarah Vaughn to Tina Turner and Frank Sinatra. Hammond spent years as resident jazz pianist and music director for the luxury hotels Shutters on The Beach and Casa Del Mar in Santa Monica, the Fitzgeralds in Woodland Hills, and currently in The Back Room, a jazz club in Canoga Park.

Hughart's vast music career encompassed 200 record albums and 300 movie scores, including work with Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, Natalie Cole, Terry Gibbs and many more. He was honored three times with the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences MVP award, which is the most any musician can receive in a lifetime.

Penland plays symphonic music, R&B, fusion rock and jazz. He has performed with Ahmad Jamal, Nancy Wilson, Stan Getz, Vaughan and several others. He is active as a music educator and has taught for the prestigious New England Conservatory.

The Performing and Communication Arts Division Spring 2008 Calendar is filled with a wide variety of events ranging from theatre productions through orchestra to blues concerts. Norma Altschler, who was at the door selling tickets with volunteer students, said "We need good audiences. We have the performances for them. The directors are already in the process choosing programs for next year."

Altschler pointed out one special concert from the list with tears in her eyes. Her friend and music enthusiast, Pamela Girard passed away recently. During her final days she established a scholarship for deserving students. A memorial concert will be held April 5 at Harbeson Hall honoring her life.

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