

10TH ANNUAL HEALDSBURG JAZZ FESTIVAL

MAY 30 THROUGH JUNE 8

PRESS BACKGROUNDER

Healdsburg Jazz Festival celebrates tenth year

It Only Happens In Healdsburg

Imagine a small town with more than 100 wineries nearby, gourmet restaurants and bakeries, galleries on every street, and live jazz three or more nights a week. A genuine American small town, Healdsburg is at a comfortable juncture of hip and historic. It's the perfect place for a great jazz festival. Healdsburg is awash in creativity, drawing the most innovative chefs, the best winemakers, and fine artists in every medium. It's a living metaphor for jazz.

Like the town it inhabits, the Healdsburg Jazz Festival is more interested in quality than quantity, more focused on high standards and fresh ideas. Founded 10 years ago, the jazz festival started small, with an unusual purpose. Something called "smooth jazz" was taking over the radio airwaves, and there was talk about a "smooth jazz" festival coming to Healdsburg.

Fans of the authentic jazz art form knew that jazz impresario Jessica Felix had recently moved to Healdsburg from the Bay Area. Jessica had already booked a few concerts in local venues, and was easily persuaded to start a hometown festival that celebrated real jazz.

From the beginning, Jessica insisted on booking quality musicians, treating them well, and introducing them to the community. Jazz bassist Charlie Haden calls Jessica a "jazz angel" for the way she treats musicians and for her unswerving dedication to music. Jessica doesn't do it alone. An orchestra of volunteers works all year, planning publicity, logistics, fund-raising, and events.

The festival has grown from a three-day event in a local movie house to a ten-day jazz experience. For a week-and-a-half at the beginning of June each year, Healdsburg — maybe the hippest small town in California — is the center of the jazz world.

In 2008, the Healdsburg Jazz Festival will celebrate its tenth year in grand style, bringing back a decade's worth of exceptional musicians for its biggest festival yet. For ten days, the festival will take over the town, with concerts in theaters, restaurants, ballparks, wineries, hotel lobbies, and a free concert in the town square.

In addition to performances, the festival sponsors films, lectures, and workshops. The community has also embraced the festival. Local businesses sponsor events, families open their homes to musicians, and restaurants offer special menu items, often named after jazz tunes. San Francisco jazz musicians say Healdsburg has better, more respectful listeners than the Bay Area.

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BACKGROUNDER, PAGE 2

The musicians at this year's Healdsburg Jazz Festival include Fred Hersch, Cedar Walton, Eddie Palmieri, Bobby Hutcherson, Zakir Hussain, Kenny Barron, Charlie Haden, James Newton, Kurt Elling, Joshua Redman, Jason Moran, Renee Rosnes, Julian Lage, Don Byron, George Cables, Pete Escovedo, and many more. Other programs include an evening of jazz films, a Sunday morning performance of spirituals, a day of Latin Jazz on the lawn, and special concerts that will educate and involve the children of the community.

The concerts are sublime, the early summer weather is always wonderful, and the food and wine in Healdsburg are matchless, but it's the Jazz Education Program that is truly the heart of the festival. Every student in the area can participate in programs in school and after school, including Operation Jazz Band, a week-long program for fifth-graders that communicates the joy of musical expression. Professional musicians work with local students on both fun and fundamentals. In the last decade, thousands of local students have become jazz fans while developing their own unique creativity and talent.

This year, the Jazz Education Program will include a return visit from a Healdsburg native, jazz composer and trumpeter Sarah Wilson, who will conduct workshops and perform an original composition with the Healdsburg High School Jazz Band. Latin Jazz performer and historian John Santos will highlight a series of innovative history lessons and performances on Latin Jazz at local secondary schools. Drum master and educator Tacuma King will bring his charismatic blend of dance, song, and drumming to local elementary schools.

The Jazz Education Program will also sponsor Don Byron's *Bug Music for Juniors*, an extraordinary exploration of the Swing Era that combines live jazz, classic cartoons, and historic film footage. Performed on Broadway, this performance is jazz education at its most exciting and entertaining.

The festival will also include *Come Sunday*, a Sunday morning performance of spirituals and sacred jazz compositions featuring James Newton, the George Cables Trio, and the mesmerizing mezzo-soprano Ruth Naomi Floyd.

The Healdsburg Jazz Festival is now on the radar of jazz fans from all over the world. When she founded the festival, Jessica wondered whether a rural community would support a jazz festival the way an urban city might, but it went together like a good jazz combo, thriving on the alchemy of talent, improvisation, and creative freedom.