

Story Pitch – Travel

Healdsburg, California and the Healdsburg Jazz Festival, Evolving Together

Google “Healdsburg” and you’ll get more than 3.5 million hits, many related to the Northern California community’s phenomenal growth and popularity as a visitor destination. The Healdsburg Jazz Festival, now in its tenth year, has been a partner in that growth. The festival would not be as successful without the rise of the town’s prominence, and the town relies on independent efforts like the jazz festival to introduce new people to its small town charm. As each grows, so does the other.

About the Town – 25 years ago, Healdsburg was the quintessential “sleepy farm town,” known for its quiet taverns and busy hardware stores. Now, the historic Downtown Plaza is surrounded by hip hotels, boutiques, bakeries and coffee shops. The Healdsburg area is also home to more than 100 wineries, from family-owned boutique wineries to internationally recognized brands.

About the Festival – The Healdsburg Jazz Festival is one of the premier cultural events in Northern California. The festival truly inhabits the town for ten days every year. Instead of a parade of musicians on a massive stage, the Healdsburg Jazz Festival performances are held in wineries, theaters, ballparks, hotel lobbies, cafés and restaurants, giving jazz fans a chance to see musicians in an intimate setting. The festival has always focused on jazz as an authentic American art form ... no “smooth jazz” allowed.

About the Connection – The jazz artists become immersed in the community, making downtown Healdsburg feel like the “backstage” of the festival. The Musicians conduct workshops and perform in the schools. They have coffee in downtown coffee shops, and stay in volunteers' homes. Don't be surprised if you see a few while dining at a local restaurant or browsing in one of the bookstores.

About the Area – In addition to outstanding jazz, great food, award-winning wineries, and the magnificent weather of Sonoma County, within an hour of Healdsburg are redwood forests, the Pacific Ocean, antique stores, farms, galleries and golf.

Story Pitch – Sarah Wilson

International jazz star visits small town home to teach and play

Healdsburg native Sarah Wilson graduated from Healdsburg High School in 1986. A former member herself of the Healdsburg High Jazz Band, Wilson has gone on to world renown as a composer, trumpeter and vocalist.

Hailed as “one of the most intriguing and promising composers and trumpeters on the contemporary music scene” (*Derk Richardson, San Francisco Chronicle*) Wilson will conduct four workshops with the Healdsburg High School Jazz Band this spring, and teach the band to play one of her original compositions.

Sarah graduated from Healdsburg High in 1986, and won a McCord Scholarship, a unique endowment that supports promising students who plan to study music or medicine. Named for benefactor Florence McCord, the scholarship sends students to prestigious universities all over the country.

Wilson credits Lew Sbrana, Healdsburg High music teacher, as being influential in her decision to become a musician and composer. Sbrana has since retired, but is still active in the Healdsburg Community Band.

Known for her work as the musical director and composer of the Lincoln Center’s Out of Doors Festival’s annual giant puppet theater spectacle for six years, Wilson also directed music for the internationally-acclaimed Bread and Puppet Theater. Additionally, she composed music for the American Museum of Natural History’s “Body Art” exhibit including other film scoring projects. Her music has been performed in the U.S. and Europe. After 12 years in New York City, she currently resides in Berkeley, California.

Wilson’s workshops with the Healdsburg High School Jazz Band are part of the Healdsburg Jazz Festival’s comprehensive Jazz Education Program, which brings professional musicians into every school in the community, at all grade levels. It also represents a homecoming for Wilson. Visits to the classroom workshops can be arranged with prior notice.