

# Kicking out the jazz

■ Jazz enthusiasts can prepare for a celebration of Northwest music organized by the University's jazz studies director

By Mason West  
Oregon Daily Emerald

As the new year starts swinging, the Northwest jazz community is preparing for competitions that will be held in late winter and early spring. At the front of this musical momentum is the School of Music's Jazz Studies Program, which will give the scene a "kick in the pants."

That kick comes from Steve Owen, director of Jazz Studies. In 1989 — his second year at the University — he organized the Oregon Jazz Celebration, a festival designed to be a purely fun and educational experience in contrast to a formal competition. Since that first year, the OJC has had only one absence, the year Owen took a sabbatical.

"I guess the festival is kind of driven by my energy," Owen said.

Scott Barkhurst, publications director for the School of Music, said Owen initially had to devote a lot of energy to establishing the celebration's place.

"There's so much interest in jazz in the Northwest that every other college and city has jazz contests going on. It's hard finding a time to shoehorn people in," he said.

Barkhurst said the event spanned three days in its earlier incarnations, but it has been streamlined into one day to keep it manageable.

The 2002 OJC takes place Saturday from 8 a.m. to 9:45 p.m. with almost non-stop activity. Bands from Northwest high schools will perform from the start of the day until 5 p.m. with a 90-minute break for lunch. Teaching clinics, broken down by instrument, run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. with frequent overlaps. Owen said the clinics are the most important part of the celebration, and he crams in "as many as we can afford."

Participation in the OJC is open to anyone willing to pay the \$10 fee, which includes all clinics and performances, though Owen said the attendants are primarily high school students.

All participants will be crammed into Beall Concert Hall at noon for a clinic with the featured performer Maria Schneider. The hourlong clinic is a prelude to the evening concert at 8:15 p.m. when Schneider will conduct the Oregon Jazz Ensemble, a select group of University musicians.

Owen was full of praise for Schneider, who he considers to be "the leading composer in the jazz field right now."

Schneider wasn't available for comment because she was in Australia conducting the Sydney Festival, a free jazz festival that draws 80,000-plus attendants. Her manager, Devra Hall, said Schneider's schedule takes her from Australia to Eugene after she "stops home to do laundry for one day."

Though her schedule is frantic, Schneider will arrive in Eugene on Friday to work with the Ore-

gon Jazz Ensemble before Saturday's performance. Owen said he tries to find respected professionals who exceed what is expected of them to participate in the OJC.

Owen also said he knows Schneider will have expectations of his students, and he has warned them that she will have plenty of criticism, though she will present it in a positive manner.

"I told them up front, 'Nothing is going to get in her way of how things should be musically, and she'll tell you what needs to be done. But you'll walk away feeling good about it,'" Owen said.

Hall said Schneider's conducting appearances at the university level are generally easier than in professional circles because the students do "a lot of hard work before she gets there."

Owen said the amount of rehearsal time the Oregon Jazz Ensemble has combined with the talent of the musicians makes it "as good as a pro group, if not better." The group annually competes in the Reno Jazz Festival and consistently places either first or second, Owen said.

To warm up the audience before Schneider and the ensemble take the stage, two high school bands that will be selected during the day will play at 7:30 p.m. Owen said choosing the two bands is not based on competition, but could just be for an outstanding soloist or general group energy. After all, this isn't a competition — it's a celebration.

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Courtesy photo

Maria Schneider is the featured performer at the 2002 Oregon Jazz Celebration.

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