

Big Band Jazz and Dessert Social swings Saturday

By Sabrina Thompson
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Things will be swinging at La Grande Middle School Saturday night, as the LHS Jazz Band and friends headline the Big Band Jazz and Dessert Social. A fundraiser for the La Grande High School band program, the Nov. 9 event will run from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. and include performances by two high school students and other community singers, desserts made by students and parents to eat, and a silent dessert auction.

Desserts for the silent auction are donated by longtime LHS Band supporters “with serious baking chops,” according to organizers.

The annual fundraising event, previously known as the USO Dance, is a tribute to the dances thrown by the United Service Organizations for the men and



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The musicians at the big band dance fundraisers for the LHS band program include students and members of the community.

women who served the country. This year's dance will feature music from the 1930s and '40s with songs like “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy,” “Beyond the Sea,” “Sing Sing

Sing” and “In the Mood.” Some of the performing students will be dressed in period attire and attendees are encouraged to do so as well. There also will be opportunities for dancing, including lessons.

“It's a really fun way to experience the Jazz Band,” Angela Morris, a parent who supports the band, said about the event. “It's different than a concert. There is more interaction with the band and you get to get up and move.”

The LHS Jazz Band is made up of primarily upperclassmen who come to school at 7 a.m. to practice. Directed by Chris Leavitt, the band gives a handful of performances throughout the year. This is one of the students' favorite events.



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The LHS Jazz Band adds to the spirit of the event by dressing in period attire — attendees are also encouraged to dress up.

“The dance is a great opportunity to perform for the community,” Jack Seydel, a junior at LHS, said, “and for us to test what we know.”

According to Sam Hansen, also a junior, jazz is one of the most difficult genres to play, as it involves a lot of improvisation. He said performing in a concert band is like reading music, while performing in a jazz band is like writing music.

“Jazz takes more effort on the part of the musician, because there is more nuance that goes into the style of music,” Hansen said. “Improvisation isn't seen as much in other genres.”

Hansen also said the dance is a great way to keep the art of jazz and swing alive. According to the

students, Leavitt encourages solos, another key part of jazz. These solos help students gain confidence in their performance and showcase their skills. However, Seydel said, working as a team is also incredibly important.

“In the rhythm section, you have to have one sound,” he said.

While members of the U.S. military will be admitted free of charge as in previous years, the organizers of the event hope that changing the name of the dance from USO will encourage all to attend, not just members of the military.

Tickets are sold at the door, \$10 for general admission, \$7 for seniors and students and \$20 for families of four or more.

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