NKU Vocal Jazz Ensemble Performs at National Jazz Convention

by Randy Pennington, Coordinator of Vocal/Choral Area

On Wednesday January 4th, days before the spring semester started the twelve vocalists and five members of the instrumental combo that plays with the group met on a cold day for daylong rehearsals. These rehearsals were to prepare the NKU Vocal Jazz Ensemble for their performance at the 3rd annual Jazz Education Network Convention (JEN) held January 4 – 7 in Louisville, Kentucky. The Vocal Jazz Ensemble was one of 30 collegiate groups selected to perform after an intense audition process in the summer of 2011. They were one of four invited vocal jazz groups.

The students traveled to Louisville stopping at an elementary school for an official outreach concert provided by the JEN convention. This hour long program provided an opportunity for the students to perform and interact with over 200 school children as help the school met Kentucky Core Standards. After the school clinic the ensemble travelled to Louisville to prepare for their performance on Saturday January 7th. The students took the time to attend performances and clinics at the convention in between rehearsals for their own performance. Outstanding guest artists joined the students in their JEN performance. Brian Hogg, Director of Jazz Studies at NKU and an international jazz artist provided his talents on saxophone. Two special guests from France, Kristin Marion and Phillipe Martel joined the students as well. Both of these internationally respected jazz musicians performed and interacted with the students. As an educator, Kristin is a certified professor in Speech Level Singing vocal technique (USA), and certified in program singing from Berklee College. Ms. Marion is an accomplished vocalists known for her “speech sound” concept of singing. Phillipe has appeared on a number of recordings that span the stylistic history of jazz from traditional Dixieland to Modern Jazz, pop music, blues, and is known as a specialist in the French “hot jazz” also known as “gypsy jazz.” It was truly an outstanding experience for the students and audience members. One of the vocalists in the ensemble, Amberly Winfrey, summed up her thoughts on the convention, especially the experiences she had outside of the NKU performance: “The opportunity to attend the JEN Conference was one that I will never forget. As a young musician it was mind-blowing to stand in a room with some of the same professional musicians who influence my learning and my own emerging style. The atmosphere of the entire conference was one of excitement and camaraderie. I’ve been to other conferences before, but none had the same feeling of togetherness that the JEN conference had. There was something musical going on at every hour of the day, and every event had a welcoming atmosphere. It was clear that every musician there was interested in learning, in one form or another. There were so many clinics and performances that broke the mold into which I had categorized Jazz.

One of the clinics I attended was about Latin Jazz, held by percussionist Bobby Sanabria. Not only was the session a history lesson, but also it was a dance class, a lesson in semantics, ethics, philosophy and social interaction all wrapped up into a 50-minute interval. I came out of the Latin Jazz session and every other clinic having learned something I didn’t know before, or with a better understanding of something I thought I’d learned. By the end of my time at the conference, I felt I had a better understanding of myself as a musician, motivation to keep learning and growing, and a greater appreciation for all the facets of the Jazz world. I was in a fantasyland where there was music everyday at all hours of the day. Everyone was there for the same purpose, to learn, share their talents and share in all the permutations of America’s indigenous art form.” The NKU Vocal Jazz Ensemble was honored to be invited as a performance ensemble at this prestigious event. Their performance at the convention was considered by many to be the best of the collegiate vocal jazz ensembles. The interaction the students had with guest artists as well as the exposure to professionals in the field in clinics and performances inspired them to achieve new levels of quality.
NKU Hosts Fourth Annual Northern Kentucky Winter Piano Pedagogy Conference

On February 4, 2012, under the organizational leadership of Professor of Music, Diana Belland, NKU held the fourth Annual Northern Kentucky Winter Piano Pedagogy Conference, "Steps to Parnassus." The event attracted a total of 56 participants, including Music Teachers National Association teachers and performers from the greater Cincinnati area as well as from Louisville, Lexington, southern Kentucky and New York State. NKU MTNA Collegiate Chapter members assisted with both the planning and the execution of the conference. Collegiate Chapter President, Natasha Pence, was delighted to welcome five members from the newly formed University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music Collegiate Chapter to the conference. Conference presenters included distinguished MTNA members, Dr. Erin Bennett, University of North Florida, Dr. Lian Tan, Miami University, and Dr. Richard Van Dyke, Cincinnati Music Academy. Dr. Diana Belland, Professor of Piano and Director, NKU Piano Pedagogy Program, directed the conference and also served as a clinician for the conference Master Class.

Dr. Belland is delighted to announce that Gail Berenson of Ohio University (http://gailberenson.com/) has agreed to serve as the clinician for next year’s Northern Kentucky Winter Piano Pedagogy Conference which will take place on Saturday, February 2, 2013. Dr. Berenson, an expert on musician wellness issues and the Past President of Music Teachers National Association, was one of the founding members of the MTNA Pedagogy Committee. Much in demand as a performer, clinician, master class artist, adjudicator, author, reviewer and pedagogy consultant, Dr. Berenson has performed and lectured in over thirty states and eight countries.

NKU Choirs Take Center Stage at the 2012 Kentucky Music Educators Convention in Louisville

The two elite choirs at NKU, the Vocal Jazz Ensemble and the Chamber Choir just returned from invited performances at the 2012 Kentucky Music Educators Association In-Service Conference in Louisville, KY. The choirs were chosen by a “blind” audition process for performances at the annual convention that draws 2000 – 3000 music educators from across the state. The Vocal Jazz Ensemble opened the convention with a performance in the convention center lobby on Thursday February 9th. The group was very well received and represented the university well. On Friday February 10th the NKU Chamber Choir presented their performance in the choral performance area of the convention center. The ensemble performed to a full house and received a standing ovation following the concert. This is the first time in KMEA history that two groups from the same school under the direction of one director have been invited as performance ensembles to this important conference.

The Vocal Jazz Ensemble program presented a variety of styles of new and older jazz charts - some with a typical rhythm section and others a cappella. It featured arrangements and compositions by some of today’s leading vocal jazz composers (i.e. Kirk Marcy and Michelle Weir) as well as transcriptions of compositions as performed by outstanding professional vocal jazz ensembles (i.e. The Real Group, Rare Silk and Swingle Singers).

The performance by the Chamber Choir was a theme oriented concert focusing of the ideas of “light” and “shadows”, “secular” and “spiritual” and our own personal journey through life as we view our world, reflect upon our own mortality and question and ponder our personal spiritual beliefs, fears and understanding. One of the key compositions in this program was a new composition Ainigma composed by Dr. Eric Knetchges, an Assistant Professor in the Music Department, specifically for the NKU Chamber Choir.

A student in the Chamber Choir summed up the convention performances well stating that “(she) had never before been in a group that presented such a difficult program. It was musically and emotionally draining. When we finished the 40-minute program, with no breaks or applause in between pieces, I looked at the crowd who seemed stunned. Suddenly they erupted with applause and a standing ovation. I knew we had an impact and I will never forget that moment.”
Eric Knechtges, Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Theory/Composition, will have his composition, “Aporia”, for euphonium and band, premiered by world-class euphonist Adam Frey (www.euphonium.com) and the Miami University Wind Ensemble on Wednesday, February 22nd. One of the elite brass soloists in the world, Adam Frey travels the globe invigorating the international music scene with his virtuoso talent, sensitive lyricism, and connection with audiences.

The NKU Trumpet Ensemble under the direction of Rachel Rodriguez, Assistant Professor of Trumpet, was invited to perform at the Ohio International Trumpet Guild (ITG) Annual Meeting hosted this year at Miami University (OH) on March 31, 2012. The ensemble, under the leadership of Dr. Raquel Rodriguez, will perform 2 pieces at the conference. One of the pieces, Fanfare Ighisu Vechi by Greg Pascuzzi, is a fanfare that was commissioned for the event. For more info please visit the conference website: http://arts.muohio.edu/faculty/olcott/otgsite/

The NKU Vocal Jazz Ensemble, under the direction of Randy Pennington, has been asked to present a special performance at the Spiral Stakes at Turfway Park by the World Choir Games on Saturday March 24th. The ensembles will be performing for the Governor of Kentucky and other dignitaries and guests in a special VIP tent. The choir will also be performing a cappella jazz music from 12:30 – 1:10 when the race begins.

Faculty Composer and Music Department Chair, Kurt Sander, has just sold the 1,000th copy of his recent CD titled As Far as the East is from the West: New Orthodox Choral Music by Gennady Lapaev and Kurt Sander. The internationally renowned Russian Musicologist, Vladimir Morosan, wrote the following review: “The CD is filled with intensely beautiful spiritual choral music, all of which will be new and heretofore unheard to most listeners... On the contemporary landscape of Orthodox music, this CD stands as a landmark event that will hopefully be a harbinger of further artistic and creative manifestations of the Orthodox Christian Faith throughout this world.” (The Musica Russica CD Buying Guide, Winter, 2011). Proceeds from the CD will be used to fund future projects through NKU’s East of Northern International Arts Initiative.

The NKU MTNA Collegiate Chapter has organized a public concert to raise funds for the Mitchell Schnure Memorial Music Scholarship recently established in honor of their son’s memory by Ann and Bill Schnure. The concert, scheduled for Friday evening, April 13, 8:00pm, will celebrate the musical contributions made by Mitchell Schnure, a gifted young pianist and accompanist, to the NKU Department of Music and will feature NKU music majors from the keyboard, voice and strings areas. Contributions to the Mitchell Schnure Memorial Music Scholarship fund may be made to the NKU Foundation. For more information, please contact Julie Budden, NKU College of Arts and Sciences.

The NKU Vocal Jazz Ensemble, under the direction of Randy Pennington, will be performing on Thursday March 29th for the Northern Kentucky Education Council and Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce Excellence in Education Dinner/Celebration at the Northern KY Convention Center. Each year the Northern Kentucky Education Council and Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce sponsor an evening that recognizes education excellence such as the Golden Apple Excellence in Teaching winners, A.D. Albright winners, Academic All-Stars and many more. The event attracts over 600 guests from across the Northern Kentucky area.

Lecturer of Music Michael Van Pelt recently commissioned Michail Goleminov, a Bulgarian composer based in Sofia, to create a new composition for saxophone and live electronics. I have been invited to premiere this new piece, The Double Life of Dr. Schoenberg, at the Biennial Conference of the North American Saxophone Alliance on March 16. The North American Saxophone Alliance is an organization made up of individuals who share a common interest in the saxophone.

NKU Adjunct Professor of Flute, Nina Perlove, was named one of 20 “Women to Watch” in 2012 by the Cincinnati Enquirer. Nina’s picture and NKU affiliation was featured prominently in the February 11 edition of the paper. Nina is currently the executive director of the American Classical Music Hall of Fame. In 2012: Nina Perlove is spearheading a high-tech, interactive “Walk of Fame” in Over-the-Rhine’s Washington Park, a worldwide first of its kind. As a freelance musician, she’s developed an app to allow park visitors to set the tempo for “dancing” water at the park’s new fountain this summer. She also was one of the first classical musicians to use YouTube for teaching. Says Perlove, “I want to be a part of this transition to redefine classical music — not to compromise or give up on it, but rather, to find its place in this changing world.”
Northern Kentucky University's Department of Music offers a full range of performance and education opportunities to music majors. Our graduates pursue successful careers as professional performers, college and university faculty, public school music teachers, private studio instructors and in allied fields within the music industry.

Our students have been accepted for graduate study at such renowned institutions as the Juilliard School, Indiana University–Bloomington, The San Francisco Conservatory of Music, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Iowa State University, the Eastman School of Music, and the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.