

Headline: Ya Like Jazz?

Subhead: How University of Idaho student performers prepare for the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival.

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Blot

Every year, thousands of people from near and far flock to the city of Moscow, Idaho, to listen to, or even play jazz hits at the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival (LHJF). While many bands are comprised of students from high schools, there are also a large number of bands who are made up of University of Idaho students.

This year marked the 58th year of the LHJF. The Festival ran from Apr. 15 to Apr. 18, with concerts, workshops and other events lasting all day. Next year's Festival will be taking place Apr. 22 through Apr. 25.

Katie Seelmeyer is a senior who performed in both Jazz Choir 1 and Chamber Jazz Choir.

"... Jazz Choir 1 always does a combined piece with our World Music Festival guest artists, and I very much enjoyed that," Seelmeyer said.

Collaboration between groups is a classic aspect of the festival, with pieces chosen specifically to highlight what each group does best.

Jacob Brotman, a junior, is in Jazz Band 2 and assisted in judging and volunteer work. Brotman reflected on last year's Jazz Fest, saying that, "There was a Brazilian vocalist, flautist, that performed with us. We did some traditional samba music... We were just sort of the background for the main [performer]."

Another student is an integral part of not just one of UI's amazing jazz bands, but three.

"I'm in Jazz Band 1, Jazz Choir 1 and Chamber Jazz Choir 2," they said. "The Jazz Band [performed with] lots of featured artists. The Jazz Choir 1 normally performs with Navin Chettri and the featured world music artist. Chamber Jazz Choir 2 [usually] does a fun spin on a classic Lionel Hampton tune in collaboration with the Jazz Band. This piece is often arranged by Dan Bukvich."

Lots of preparation for LHJF is needed, as without it, the event would never come together smoothly.

“I prepared by not breaking my finger, like I did last year,” one student lightheartedly mentioned. “Most of the musicians don’t receive music until a few weeks beforehand. I am involved in a group called SPEC Crew, which is responsible for putting together every single performance site across campus. This includes putting together every little piece of each drum set and getting bass and guitar amps into each room.”

“I did my best to make my schedule open for any volunteer opportunities that present themselves,” Seelmeyer said. “Whether that’s performing or assisting at a master’s class or helping to ‘herd’ high schoolers, I wanted to make sure I was doing my part.”

Behind-the-scenes work is the cornerstone of LHJF, and along with musicians helping each other out, volunteer work is crucial. One volunteer, Samuel Cooper, was able to speak a bit about his experience.

“It depends on what job you are given,” Cooper said. “My first year volunteering, I was a runner, so I ferried supplies, lunches and sometimes even communication from the main office to anywhere on campus. Sometimes I took messages, and other times I fetched people themselves, because when the festival is happening, people don’t always notice messages on their phones. Last year I was a driver, so I ferried artists and presenters from their hotels to the campus and back.”

As for volunteering at LHJF, the process is quite simple. Cooper explained that there was not much prep work done on his end before the festival.

“You sign up, then go through a short training course on the UI website,” Cooper said. “Since the festival heavily involves high schoolers, volunteers need to be aware of how to protect minors, and that’s mainly what the training course is for.”

Volunteering is not only immensely helpful for the musicians who perform at the festival, but it can also be quite rewarding. If you volunteer for a certain number of hours, you get one free ticket to any concert of your choosing. For the past couple of years, four hours of volunteering has yielded one free concert ticket, with the maximum number of free concert tickets being three. They are always in need of volunteers and seeing a crucial aspect of the university’s community from another angle is rewarding in and of itself.

“Volunteering is quite relaxing if you have the right frame of mind, because in the overall scheme of things, it’s not your problem if something goes wrong,” Cooper noted. “You’re just here to help out, and there’s really no pressure.”

If you decide to volunteer for the 2026 Festival, be sure to sign up as soon as possible. Doing so guarantees you get to help with something fun while also lightening the load on the organizers.

Because the festival is so beloved, it is no surprise that LHJF has been a tradition for almost 60 years. With the music and energy of jazz that overtakes Moscow, it is hard not to enjoy at least one aspect of the festival.

“I’m looking forward to sharing music with a huge audience of people from different backgrounds,” one student said. “I’m also excited to experience live music for myself. I always love meeting the visiting artists and having conversations with them about their life and experiences.”

Seelmeyer shared excitement for the guest artists as well.

“I always look forward to the guest artists,” she said, “but this year specifically I was looking forward to Take 6 and Jamie Baum. I love a cappella vocal music, and Take 6 are legendary for their work with Stevie Wonder and others. I also love seeing all our high school/other guests get excited about the music.”

All performers would agree that there is no better feeling than seeing people get excited or emotional about what you perform. Coupled with the energy of a week out of the ordinary, Jazz Fest is the place to be if you wish to lighten your mood.

“I personally love the complete change of pace,” Cooper said. “The whole week is thrown up into the air and juggled about, with classes canceled and volunteering and going to concerts, so it provides a nice change of atmosphere.”

“I [was excited for] the volunteering that I got to do,” Brotman said. “I loved seeing the adjudicators work with the students because oftentimes they don’t just give them a lesson that’s super invaluable, but they also really encourage the young musicians. And you can just see how excited they are to be getting this really intelligent and experienced feedback from professional musicians.”

During Jazz Fest, clinics were hosted by experts to teach the visiting high school students' critical techniques that they might not have been taught otherwise. Brotman gave an example, explaining that if a big band wasn't in sync during rehearsal, a clinic may be had to help them sync with each other. One part of the volunteering experience is assisting with those clinics.

There are many more events that make up Jazz Fest, and a seemingly endless amount of fun to be had. If you didn't attend, it will be back next spring, so be sure to stop by and see what all the buzz is about.