



Tony Bennett donates instruments during Jazz Fest

Posted 5/1/2009 1:54 PM

By Stacey Plaisance, Associated Press Writer



By Bill Haber, AP

Tony Bennett talks to members of the school band as he visits KIPP Believe College Prep in New Orleans, Thursday.

NEW ORLEANS — Jazz crooner Tony Bennett handed out dozens of new instruments Thursday to students at a charter school founded in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, hoping the tubas, trumpets and trombones would be used to carry on New Orleans' vibrant musical tradition.

Meanwhile, the second half of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival got underway.

As Bennett shook hands with students and posed for photographs, some of the \$100,000 worth of instruments were laid out on a table at KIPP Believe College Prep, a public charter school established after Hurricane Katrina flooded 80% of the city in 2005. The school is one of five KIPP charter schools serving roughly 1,000 of the city's students since

Katrina.

"This means instruments will be available to these students for years to come, to continue making music history in New Orleans," said Bennett, who was treated Thursday to performances of *Free Spirit Overture* and *My Funny Valentine* by the school's symphonic and jazz bands.

"These kids are amazing. What I heard today was real music. They played with feeling, with such heart," the 82-year-old Bennett said.

The donation effort was set in motion by a jazz fan from New York who won a "Big Give" contest hosted by Oprah Winfrey's magazine. The winner, Barry Jaffin, wanted to use his \$5,000 in winnings to put instruments in New Orleans schools.

Bennett and a host of charitable groups such as Music Rising and the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation got on board with the cause.

"We were all very excited," said 13-year-old Deon Butler, a 7th-grade trumpet player who performed in both the symphonic and jazz bands for Bennett. "Out of all the schools in the U.S., he came to hear us."

Bennett, a 15-time Grammy winner, released his signature *I Left My Heart in San Francisco* in 1962 and remains a popular performer.

Bennett was accompanied Thursday by his wife, Susan Benedetto, who runs the couple's New York-based Exploring the Arts program, which contributed to the instrument donation. On Friday, Bennett is slated to perform at Jazz Fest, which

Advertisement

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



kicked off its second weekend Thursday.

School groups from all over the city were scattered across the festival grounds. Besides listening to music, the kids got some hands-on craft experience. Jared Wilkerson, a 4th-grader at Hynes Charter School in New Orleans, helped 67-year-old carpenter Ray Weimer cut a piece of cypress wood to make an old-fashioned roof shingle.

"That was fun," Wilkerson said, chuckling with schoolmates.

Jazz Fest veterans were also having a good time.

"Jazz Fest is my religion," said Nancy Gates, a Boston native who said she has not missed a Jazz Fest since 1988. "This is the mother of all festivals, the best festival in the world. It has the best food, the best music and the best crowd. I love it all."

For the Ulf family from Kensington, Md., the festival is the site of a family reunion each year. Parents David and Ellen Ulf fly to New Orleans with their 19-year-old son, Ryan, to visit their daughter, 24-year-old Ellen, who lives there.

"We always time the trip to catch Jazz Fest," Ellen Ulf said, as she handed out cochon de lait po-boys and alligator pies to the rest of the family in a shady spot under a tree near the Cajun and zydeco stage.

"We like this stage because we don't have music like this where we live," David Ulf said. "I can see Neil Young anywhere. I can only see Corey Ledet here."

Young is slated to perform on Sunday, the festival's closing day. Thursday's closing acts were guitarist Ben Harper, country singer Emmylou Harris and soul singer Marva Wright.

Copyright 2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Advertisement

USA TODAY
AutoPilot

The new travel app for iPhone® and iPod touch®

Presented by:

SEE HOW IT WORKS >>

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™