Nov. 12, 2013

New director leads Sac State jazz singers

Sacramento State's jazz singers (www.csus.edu/music/jazz/) have a new director, but she’s a familiar face and voice to the award winning ensembles.

Former director Kerry Marsh and his wife, Sac State vocal instructor Julia Dollison, moved to Northern Colorado at the end of last year. Stepping up to the music stand as Marsh’s replacement is Gaw Vang.

While her position is new, Vang’s association with the jazz singers goes back a few years as a performer and, last year, as the groups’ student director, overseeing one of the University’s groups and assisting Marsh with the other.

“Kerry prepared me for this, so it was a good transition,” Vang says. “But when I started in September it kind of hit me that this was now my program and something that I will have to build upon.”

The vocal jazz program has two groups – the Jazz Singers and C-SUS Voices – who will hold their first concert of the season at 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 22. The program includes “It’s You or No One,” “So in Love” by Cole Porter, “Round Midnight” and “Blackbird/Bye Bye Blackbird.” These are all new arrangements by Marsh, students Timothy Weiss and Melissa Fulkerson, and alumna Kate Janzen.

Prior to that, the two groups will perform as part of a program with the Doug Pauly Jazz Quintet at 3 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 17, in Westminster Church. That concert is sponsored by the Sacramento Community Concert Association (http://bit.ly/1h3TJ18).

Guiding music students through their paces is nothing new for Vang. She began her teaching career when she graduated from the now-defunct Visual and Performing Arts Charter, and VAPAC officials asked her to stay on. She was 18 at the time. “I graduated in June of 2004 and started teaching in the fall of 2004,” Vang says.
Originally a percussion major, Vang has also taught that discipline at C.K. McClatchy High School, invited by a former instructor when he took a position there.

When Marsh left, Music Department officials naturally turned to Vang, who is studying for her master’s in voice. While named the vocal jazz director, she is teaching the groups as a graduate assistant, with hopes of applying for the position on a permanent basis when she earns her master's degree. “Department Chair Ernie Hills, the faculty, staff and Jazz Studies Director Steve Roach have all been very supportive,” she says.

Under Marsh, the vocal groups won Downbeat magazine’s College Vocal Group of the Year award 12 years running. Vang fully intends to keep that tradition going. “We submitted a raw, in-the-rehearsal-room recording last year – no studio recording. It was very genuine,” Vang says. “We’ll be submitting again in December, and also submitting for the Monterey Next Generation Jazz Festival.”

While doing all that, Vang also will be taking care of the 50 people she has as private voice students, and trying to squeeze in a few solo performances around the city.

Vang credits her success to all the people in the public education system who have helped and encouraged her throughout the years. “I’ve been really fortunate to have had all these directors giving me opportunities,” she says.

Tickets for the Nov. 22 concert are $10 general, $7 seniors and $5 students, available at the University Ticket Office, (916) 278-4323 or www.csus.edu/hornettickets.

For more information on the vocal jazz groups, contact the Music Department at (916) 278-5191. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. - Craig Koscho