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Jazz whiz gets gold ticket

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An 18-year-old Humber College student was one of the last people to play with Oscar Peterson before the jazz legend died last month, and he has also joined a renowned international jazz ensemble in Toronto.

“It is an honour to play music and be recognized for it and represent Humber,” said Eli Bennett, a first-year student in the bachelor’s degree in contemporary music.

“Humber is the best music school in Canada,” he said. “It suited my needs and their program is shaped in a way that fits my interests.”

Last year, Bennett won the Oscar Peterson Award. He also had the chance to play during last year’s Grammy Awards with the legendary jazz musician.

“All of this achievement is a very great bonus, but the most important thing is the music,” said Bennett.

He recorded a videotape audition at Humber last November that gave him the opportunity to join the Clifford Brown/Stan Getz All Stars Ensemble.

“The other members are really talented and it is so great to play with like-minded musicians my age,” said Bennett.

The Brown/Getz All Stars is an instrumental jazz band made up of six musicians who are chosen from a pool of international students.

The band performed last week at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre during the 2008 International Association of Jazz Education conference in Toronto (IAJE).

The conference is the largest jazz event in North America and is dedicated to musical education and advancement, said Thurston Briscoe, program director of WBGO, a jazz radio station in Newark, New Jersey.

“This is a conference where people take it seriously and you’re seeing a lot of teachers, students and professional musicians here,” said Briscoe. “There is a lot of playing music and studying music at the conference.”

Bennett started playing only five years ago after he found his father’s old saxophone in the garage, and has quickly honed his skill.

“Eli Bennett is one of the most gifted musicians I have seen in over 20 years,” said Denny Christianson, music program director. “His achievements should speak loudly about his career path.”



photo by tracey finklestein

The Clifford Brown/Stan Getz All Stars perform at the IAJE conference last week in Toronto.

Aside from playing the saxophone, Bennett has written several compositions that he's performed in jazz festivals across North America.

Next month, Bennett will go on a nine-day music tour across England with the Humber Studio Jazz Ensemble.

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