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## Humber student wins International Award



Photo/REBEKAH WILLIAMS

Eli Bennett, 19, Humber music student, plays his 1961 Selmer Mark tenor saxophone that has helped him secure the International 2008 Yamaha Young Performing Artists Award for 'best saxophonist' in his age category.

### ***Eli Bennett, 19, honoured as best saxophonist in his age category***

By REBEKAH WILLIAMS  
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Text

What started out as a hobby in his father's garage turned into a career that has brought with it international recognition and promises of becoming a world-class jazz musician.

Eli Bennett, 19, tenor saxophone player from Vancouver, British Columbia and music student at Humber College won the International 2008 Yamaha Young Performing Artists Award (YYPAA), for best saxophonist under 21.

Bennett has won a lot of awards in the past, but said this one stands out.

"It's really an honour to have been given this award," said Bennett. "It's a very prestigious award and I'm also very happy to have been the first Canadian to have been awarded this. I'm really happy to represent Humber and Canada as well."

Denny Christianson, program coordinator of the Humber music department, said Humber music is proud of Bennett.

"It's a huge honor for Eli," said Christianson. "He is one of the most gifted musicians that will pass through Humber and that goes back 35 years."

Bennett began playing at the age of 12 and by the age of 14 was playing professionally.

"My dad had this old tenor (saxophone) lying around that he played in high school himself. He's actually a drummer and a film composer, but one day he pulled it out of the garage and suggested I try it and ever since then I've loved the sound of the instrument."

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Christianson said the music department knew about Bennett since Grade 9 or 10, and that Bennett was aware of the music program as well.

"Every kid in Canada who takes jazz seriously, most of them know about Humber," said Christianson. "It's a mutual sort of thing. I did recruit him from the standpoint that I got together with him and talked about how I thought Humber would be a great place for him to grow as a young musician."

Bennett said he agreed Humber was the right place for him and that there were a lot of key elements that drew him to Humber.

"I wanted to stay in Canada number one and Humber is the best music school in Canada and the faculty here are world class musicians and the program is structured specifically to cater to my needs in the sense that I can study composition and jazz performance in the same degree," said Bennett who added, "There's a very high level of student musicians here as well, plus Toronto is a great scene, really multicultural and the jazz scene is great."

Mark Promane, head of the woodwinds department at Humber said the program allows Bennett to develop and expand his skills.

"Humber gives him the opportunity to perform with other musicians of a high caliber," said Promane. "Our particular curriculum is geared towards exactly what he wants to do, which is continuing to hone his performance skills and also allows him to develop more as a composer through his lessons in composition and also gives him the knowledge of how to complete a recording project."

Bennett is involved with a variety of jazz bands, such as the Humber College Studio Jazz Ensemble, directed by Christianson, Kirk McDonald's student quintet band as well as his own Eli Bennett Quartet that plans to tour Western Canada this summer, and release a CD within the next year.

Bennett said he draws his inspiration from God, his parents, his teachers, and his all-time favorite jazz artists.

Bennett said winning awards wasn't a thought when he started playing, but rather that he was fortunate to receive them.

"It definitely was not my doing," said Bennett. "God lead the way and provided these things for me and so I'm very grateful for that and I'm just happy to be where I am today."

Both Promane and Christianson see a bright future for Bennett and Christianson said his talent is one that is, "mature beyond his years."

"He's extra extra special and we're very proud to be part of his growth," said Promane. "He's destined to become I think a world-class artist."

Bennett said he plans to pursue his jazz performance career, but is also interested in composing, and working for films.

"I really like film scoring, I think I'll be pursuing that. Humber just started offering film scoring courses along with their brand new studio that was just built and so that genre of music is really interesting to me because it's such a wide variety," said Bennett.



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