

What are the possible dangers of competition in jazz education?

Klevan: As an athletic coach, I strive to teach my athletes that although the goal is to win, there is a great deal of personal value and development that comes from preparing for the competition. Winning is what we strive for, but it should not always be the ultimate goal. There is a parallel in music, but the emphasis has to be on the process and not the final outcome of a competitive event. In music, those who participate are the winners.

McCurdy: Historically, the idea of competition began as an effort to try to get more people involved in jazz education. Once we achieved that goal, it's important to keep things in perspective. Those who oppose competitive festivals see some of the negatives that take place as a result of competing. They have seen kids crying at the end of a performance, directors who yell at the kids because they didn't win, and parents who are upset at their kids and the kids from the other schools because their kids' band didn't win.

Marantz: The danger is that a group will win, and then feel that they have made it—that they have arrived. It's the inflation that goes into a young kid who's won an award for one day and time, rather than longevity. Kids don't think big picture; they look at whatever faced them at a given time.

Dyas: I don't think that students treat it like a football game and go, "Wow, we won the championship." They feel like this is an opportunity for them to grow and feel they're that much further along for the next year's competition. I've seen people not get into the Brubeck Colony on the first or second try, but because of learning and growing by going through the process, they try it again the next year and have gained so much more ability.

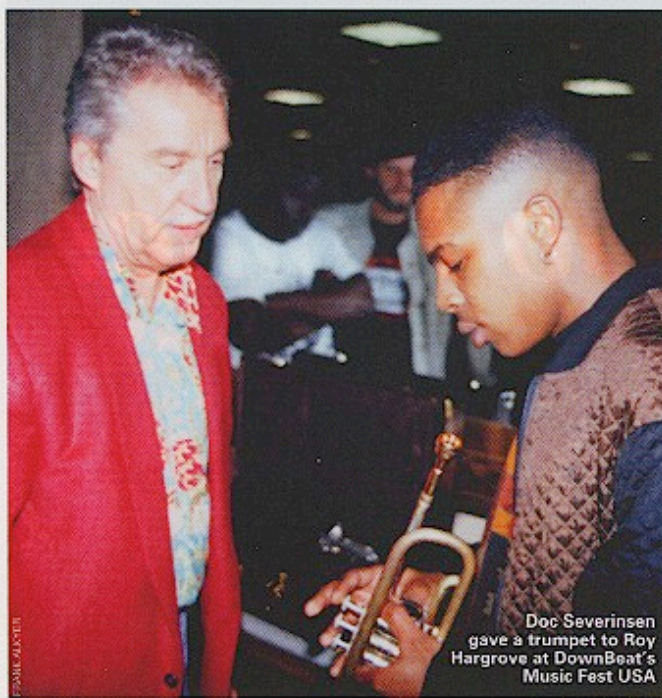
Marsalis: When they lose, everyone thinks they got robbed or has some excuse about why they should have won. But no one can deny the excitement they feel when competing. If the art is lost, that's because the vision of art is not central to the competition. Integrity is central to any contest. Pressure makes a performance memorable. We're only playing music, not fighting a war. Sometimes you get more out of losing. As they say: You haven't been in love until you've gotten your heart broken. And winners never complain about competition.

Athayde: This is my 38th year of teaching, and I don't want to hear any more of this crap about winning and losing. I want to hear, "That was intense. When you played that piece, I cried." It's OK to see a drill team do things perfectly, or a marching band, but when it comes to playing, are you swinging or aren't you?

How should directors put competition into perspective for their students, and what are ways some directors tend to amplify the negative aspects of competition?

Dyas: Directors can become more worried about getting that superior rating than they are if their kids can improvise. Competition shouldn't override the students' education, and oftentimes it does. That's why you see jazz band after jazz band with kids who can't play jazz. What they can do is play in this "concert band" that happens to have a swing beat and the instrumentation of a typical big band. I've seen bass players play in jazz bands for four or five years who can't walk a blues, pianists who can't read chord symbols and guitar players who are still playing bar chords with the guitar hanging down to their knees and who don't have the foggiest idea of what comping means.

Marantz: It's up to the director to make sure that their kids aren't walking around feeling like they're the next Carl Fontana or Michael Brecker. Many fine jazz artists made great sacrifices for the good of the music,



Doc Severinsen gave a trumpet to Roy Hargrove at DownBeat's Music Fest USA

"Competition can be good because it can give musicians a sense of achieving something."

—TRUMPETER ROY HARGROVE

and winning an award just can't compare to a lifetime of dedication to jazz. There is a history to our music that the kids aren't often aware of, and it's up to the director to teach them that history and the background of their particular instrument.

Klevan: I have seen the ugly side of colleagues who get caught up in the competition aspect of a music festival or event. If music directors would place emphasis on what the students will gain from participating in a competition—comments from the judges, hearing other groups, attending workshops—the competitive aspect would be lessened and much more would be gained. I've witnessed a band director yelling at the festival staff because pages in the score of the sight-reading music were out of order. Granted, a mistake was made, but the sight-reading judge was asked to hear the band again and commented that the mark they received was accurate no matter how many times they played the piece. Soon, the band director was surrounded by his students who were also yelling at the staff. The band director did nothing to stop his students, and encouraged them to chime in. For them it was a negative experience.

McCurdy: If the director counsels in the right way, competition can be a healthy thing. It becomes more of an intrinsic competition: You're competing with yourselves, instead of competing against other bands. Was Ellington's band better than Basie's, Benny Goodman's or Fletcher's Henderson's band? They were just different. In that sense, "competition" becomes superfluous.

Clayton: I encourage any of my students who choose to enter competitions to embrace the situation as another chance to share their music; to share their art, and to view it as a festival, as a platform that allows them to hear others. I encourage them to become excited about what others are doing, as others will about what you are doing. If after you play you receive applause, a prize, a smile or a positive comment, it is frosting on the cake. You've done what you do and it affected people.