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The art of music making on display at Analy band festival

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SEBASTOPOL - Ben Fader, a fifth grader at Brook Haven Middle School in Santa Rosa, got some tips Friday from a university music professor on better ways to hold his flute so the big wind that drives great sound would emerge from the business end of his instrument.

And Joelle Hagen, an Analy High senior who plays French horn in the Sebastopol school's orchestra and honor bands, fingered the valves on her instrument as she listened to another music professor give a practical lesson on connecting a bunch of notes and turning them into musical magic.

"This is a check point that kind of kicks off our year and makes us more serious about all our performances," said Joelle.

Ben and Joelle were two of about 1,200 students from 24 middle and high schools across Sonoma County who are descending upon Analy High School for a 2-day festival of band and orchestra music in which a panel of music professors assess their performances.

"Why wait until late in the school year to find out areas you should have been working on all year?" asked Analy music director Vance Regan. "Playing in front of judges is a great motivator for bands to play their best. It is so easy to get off track when you play for home audiences all the time and not address the essentials of the work you still need to do."

This is the 12th year that Analy has convened its fall music festival. This year it is drawing more bands than ever before and the number of participating students rival those at this weekend's homecoming game and dance.

Orchestras and bands of differing skill levels from Analy, Windsor, Carillo and



JOHN BURGESS / *The Press democrat*
The Analy High School band mugs it up for the camera Friday after the official formal photo during a county-wide band and orchestra festival at Analy High School.

Casa Grande highs and Slater, Healdsburg, Mountain Shadows, Creekside and Rincon Valley middle schools perform today. Performances are from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and are open to the public.

"This festival is unique in California because it focuses on music making and learning during a school season that is usually dedicated to the marching band," said Eric Hammer, a University of the Pacific at Stockton music professor who has been a festival judge for six years. "It is the process, not the American Idol-style competition that is important."

Each band plays three selections before parents and public gathered in the high school auditorium. No awards, ribbons or trophies are handed out.

Instead, a panel of judges from Santa Rosa Junior College, University of California at Davis and the University of the Pacific at Stockton views each performance and keeps a scorecard of comments. Afterwards, each band reconvenes in the schools' band room for a clinic in which one of the judges works with the group on improvements.

"It is great to perform in a real hall," said Steve Mitchell, music instructor at Windsor Middle School, which sent almost 140 students to Friday's event. "We generally play in a gym or a cafeteria."

Bryant Whiting, an eighth grader at Windsor Middle School who plays trombone, called it "the experience that gets us ready for the big performance."

The festival is the biggest annual undertaking of the Analy Band Wagon, a non-profit group that supports the school band programs for students participating in orchestra, jazz and performance band. Kelly Jaco, a volunteer coordinator said hosting the events requires more than 100 volunteers "because the shuffling of bands from warm-up room to auditorium to clinic afterwards has to run like clockwork."

The Analy program enrolls about 220 of the school's 1,300 students, likely making it the school with the highest per capita music program enrollment in the state.

Jaco, a Band Wagon board member whose daughter Breanna has played in the festival for the past three years, said the event turns into an extended family gathering.

"The first year, I had to twist her arm to play the flute," Jaco said. "This year, she took on the viola and plays in the honor band and orchestra. She doesn't plan on being a musician, but being in the band and being part of this festival is like being in whole family, they get close."

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