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## Lafayette's Music Man Takes on New Gig

By Diane Claytor



Bob Athayde, Music Director at Stanley Middle School, spends his weekend nights performing at La Finestra Restaurant. Photo Diane Claytor

parents and three siblings all played for fun. "But I'm the only one it really stuck with," Athayde said. At 9-years-old, he picked up the trumpet, playing through high school. "I listened to records and played along with them." He favored Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass and jazz musicians like Louis Armstrong - but played both rock and soul, performing with different groups at school dances, churches, "just about anywhere we could," he remembers fondly. The trumpet was great, Athayde said, but he discovered he really liked sounds consisting of more than one note at a time, something that couldn't be done on the trumpet. So "I started messing around with chords on the piano" and that soon became his instrument of choice.

As a freshman at California State University, Hayward, he joined the jazz band, first as a trumpet player and then playing the piano, mainly because "they had a bunch of trumpet players and were short on pianists." He began playing professionally, providing music at weddings, parties, funerals. "If they needed a piano player, I was there," he says.

With his bachelor's degree in music and a teaching credential in hand, Athayde moved forward with his true passion - teaching music to young people. Positions in San Lorenzo and Pinole preceded his coming to Stanley Middle School in 1986.

The much-awarded and much-loved Athayde brings energy and creativity to his students, now numbering more than 300 in Stanley's five concert bands, two jazz bands and one chorus. And in his classes, everyone plays. "My philosophy is that everyone is invited and everyone gets to play," he explained.

Summers for Athayde are not for lounging around. For the last 15 years, the Orinda resident has spent a week in Sitka, Alaska, teaching and mentoring students at the Sitka Fine Arts Camp. And then there's the Lafayette Summer Music Jazz Workshop, a week-long program that Athayde founded and has directed for 18 years, attracting people of all ages interested in learning and playing jazz.

If that's not enough to keep him busy, Athayde also teaches a jazz improv class at Saint Mary's College, teaches master classes and interviews artists at the annual Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival in Idaho, and jams with friends frequently.

Bob Athayde lives and breathes music; it fills both his days and nights. He loves band music and orchestra music, jazz and pop. (When asked which he likes best, he responded, without hesitation, "Whatever I'm

playing.") And Athayde doesn't ever seem to tire of it, which is good

considering he has spent the last 40 years teaching music to thousands of young people. And now his nights - at least his weekend nights - are spent entertaining diners at Lafayette's La Finestra Restaurant.

Ask him a question about music and Athayde doesn't just give a verbal explanation; he moves over to the piano where his fingers fly across the keyboard, demonstrating his point. Whether he's playing the piano or proudly talking about the students he's worked with as Lafayette's Stanley Middle School's Music Director for the past 30 years, his passion and enthusiasm are evident.

The Oakland native grew up around music. His

And then there's his latest gig - solo pianist on weekend nights at La Finestra. "This job is the greatest," he states. "I play classic songs, the kind most people recognize." Calling himself a commercial musician rather than a jazz musician, Athayde has a repertoire of approximately 1,000 songs. "And I just keep trying to learn more." He plays both pop and jazz at La Finestra and even, occasionally, sings. "I'm there to provide background music," he explains. "A waiter serves the food, I serve the music. I'm there to enhance the dining experience."

On a recent Saturday night, La Finestra was bustling and Athayde, looking dapper in his dark suit and tie, was sitting at the piano, softly playing tunes that would be familiar to most diners. Suddenly, at a nearby table, one of the five Saint Mary's College Christian Brothers who were enjoying a night out started singing along as Athayde played "If Ever I Should Leave You." Soon his tablemates joined in and it wasn't long before other diners added their voices. Athayde kept on playing. Patrons suggested songs and Athayde played them. Minutes later, a customer sat down at the chair next to Athayde and sang; once she returned to her table, a gentleman, waiting for his table to be ready, took her place to sing along.

Athayde admits there are some Fridays when, leaving school and feeling exhausted, he's wondering how he's going to get through the evening. "And then I start playing and the music absolutely rejuvenates me," he says. He's also energized seeing former students and parents walk through the restaurant's doors.

Many years ago, when Athayde was pursuing an advanced degree, one of his instructors suggested that he "become the village music teacher of Lafayette." It looks like that's exactly what he did...and so much more.



#### Local Schools Perform at Concert at the Res

The 22nd annual Concert at the Res will be held from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, May 14.

Since 1996, The Lafayette Rotary has hosted an afternoon of live music at the Lafayette Reservoir featuring local school bands from Acalanes High School, Stanley Middle School, Bentley School and Westlake Middle School. In the last few years the program has expanded to include young dancers and singers from the Town Hall Troupe and the Lamorinda Theatre Academy.

This annual concert raises money to support the local school music programs as well as other Rotary-sponsored programs such as Meals on Wheels, Trust in Education and Rotary scholarships. The concerts are presented on the outdoor stage in the Lafayette Reservoir that was entirely built and funded by the Lafayette Rotary Club and individual community donors, and has recently been deeded to EBMUD to be operated by them for use and enjoyment by the public.

The event was conceived by Lafayette Rotarian Dick Holt over 20 years ago to provide a venue



to showcase and help fund local school music programs through donations, corporate sponsorships, and the proceeds from a day-of-the-event raffle.

Along with the live entertainment, there will be food and drinks for purchase. It is also the perfect spot for a picnic on the lawn, and chairs and shade tents will be provided for those attending the concert. Though the stage is a short walk from the parking area, the Rotary Club will be providing golf cart transportation to and from the stage for those who may desire it.

Public restrooms and a children's play area are nearby, and parking is available for \$7 all day or at metered parking.



Stanley Middle School musicians were thrilled with the news that the Lafayette City Council last week proclaimed April 27 as Stanley Middle School Jazz Messengers' Day in Lafayette. This honors the many achievements the middle school jazz band has made this year, including participating in the "Next Generations in Jazz Festival" in Monterey and receiving a shared first place award from Downbeat Magazine as a top Middle School Large Jazz Ensemble in the nation. This will be published in the June edition of Downbeat Magazine.

Although Stanley Music Director Bob Athayde knew about the award for the past two months, he had to keep it secret from his students until the proclamation at the April 25 meeting. "It was hard," he says, "but it was worth the wait."

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