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Minson takes over musical direction at Stanley; Jazz Cafe planned, May 12

By Jennifer Wake



Stanley Middle School Music Director Todd Minson at work in his new post. Photo provided

dabbling with the drums (in the footsteps of his father, who was also a percussionist) and at times, singing in venues and settings ranging from orchestra pits to rock concert stages to church gigs, he never lost touch with his alma mater and kept an important side gig as an LPIE instructor. With Bob Athayde's encouragement, Minson eventually went back to school and got his teaching credential which helped him land a job in the Mt. Diablo Unified School District teaching at the elementary and middle school level. "When Bob told me he was retiring (and encouraged me to apply), I decided to go for it and luckily, I got hired and so here I am," Minson says with an ear-to-ear smile.

When Todd Minson graduated from Stanley Middle School in 1992, he didn't imagine that he'd be back 30 years later to fill the big shoes of his music teacher Bob Athayde.

After graduating from Acalanes in 1996 Minson headed to college with aspirations of following in the steps of his music teachers including not only Athayde but also the music and band teachers he'd had in the Lafayette School District stemming all the way back to his days at Springhill Elementary School. "I intended to become a music teacher, because all of the wonderful music and band teachers I had growing up inspired me," Minson says. "In college, life took me in a different direction and I became a performing musician and a working musician."

As Minson pieced together his musical career, performing in gigs while playing the trumpet, the French horn and

Minson was transitioning into his new role around the same time the youngest of his three children (now 11 months old) was arriving.

Music seems to be in Minson's bones. He loves listening to it. He loves creating it. He loves performing it. He loves teaching it. And, as much as he loves and breathes music, he loves being a family man. "I loved performing (as my main gig) but it was tough being out late most nights when I started having kids (with a now 10-year-old son and a 7-year-old and soon to be 1-year-old daughter) and I wanted a different lifestyle," Minson says. "Teaching helps me have that lifestyle, where I can do what I love (while supporting the next generation of musicians) and also still have time for my family."

Minson says regardless of one's age or stage or life or field of study or career trajectory, music has something to offer everyone. "Music is a central part of being a human being. You can't go anywhere without having music on in the background. Music is in stores. Music is in movies," Minson says. "It's everywhere and it touches on so many aspects of human life - whether it's giving you a fun beat to dance to just offering you something really powerful or emotional to touch your human spirit. I can't imagine life without it." And, music is a transferable skill that, in Minson's estimation, has as much to offer a future scientist as a performer.

"It teaches teamwork. Kids have to figure out how to work with other people," he says. "And they're working toward a common goal of creating beautiful music together while making all the pieces fit together."

On Friday, May 12 Minson and his students will bring the magical elements of music, ambiance and community together for the annual Jazz Caf \heartsuit so that folks of all ages can have a chance to experiences the high-end prestigious elements of a night of jazz with dim lights, coffees, teas and desserts inside Stanley's multipurpose room. An assortment of food trucks will also be outside.

"The Jazz Caf \heartsuit started under Bob's leadership and we're trying to keep the tradition alive as we transform our multi-use room into a jazz club with mood lighting, tables with flowers on them," Minson says. "The kids get to play in the kind of atmosphere that you wouldn't expect in a school gym. We'll have a professional sound person. (It's the real deal.)"

The Jazz Caf \heartsuit is free and open to everyone. It takes place at Stanley Middle School from 6 to 9 p.m. on Friday, May 12.

Josh Norek says Minson's homecoming to his middle school alma mater makes this year's Jazz Caf \heartsuit extra special. "It's fantastic (having Todd as a product of the Lafayette school system) back. Just like the teacher

character on 'Welcome Back Kotter' who returns to teach at his former school, Todd is able to return to Lafayette and help foster a love for jazz with the students."

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