

SAX REDUX:



Active Arts artists rekindle their love affair with the saxophone

"Who wants to solo? Come on, **go for it!**" urges saxophone coach Matt Otto, his words rising above the din of forty sax players as they chug through Tito Puente's *Oye Como Va*. One brave soul, his tenor sax at the ready, rises from his chair and warbles a solo above the churning rumba beat.

"Loosen your lip. No tugging," says team teacher Michael Turre, speaking a secret code that only sax players can understand. "Don't bite so hard," he adds. The students all pitch forward in their chairs, concentrate, and pour forth an earthy vibrato that nearly rattles the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion's glass chandeliers.

The Saturday morning pick-up band of tenor and alto saxes was **groovin' high** in a recent *Get Your Chops Back* (GYCB) workshop held on the Chandler's mezzanine level. Part of the Music Center's popular Active Arts program, GYCB pairs amateur players, many who have not picked up their instruments



since high school, with some of LA's top professional artist-coaches. The three-hour workshop includes breakout sessions where students are exposed to a variety of musical genres. Previous GYCB sessions featured flute and guitar.

Active Arts participants strive to do — and not just view. They drive for miles,



putting sensitive egos at risk, just for the fun of being creative with others. The program has accrued a significant three-year track record, touching thousands of culturally diverse southern Californians across a huge demographic swath.

"My mother made me come," admits 24-year-old Gerid Ollison, an ultra-fit Marine on home leave from a tour of Japan and Iraq. "She mailed me my dusty sax case and told me to get up to LA So I drove three hours north this morning from Chula Vista."

"I can be lazy," says 48-year-old Jacob Cohn, a Getty Museum building maintenance manager. "The warm-up exercises — particularly the long tones — are good for me. I normally skip that stuff. It helps to play with others," he says. "I tend to practice alone."

Valerie Jones, a Cal Poly Pomona graduate student in landscape architecture, says: "I hadn't played in years. I was so scared I almost turned around on the freeway. The chance to play Cumbia drew me," she says.

Active Arts' free, or low-cost, activities have something for everyone — dance, singing, storytelling, and music-making. The program's ambitious scope and sheer number of participants makes it exemplary on a national basis.

Active Arts is neither a marketing initiative, audience development strategy, nor a community outreach program. Its sole agenda is to validate creativity for its own sake and improve the shared quality of life in Los Angeles.

"I either play my sax at church or I play jazz standards. They had us playing R&B, Latin beat, and improv. That's a good stretch for me," says 42-year-old Ayric Osborne from Huntington Beach in Orange County. "With five kids at home and a high-pressure job as a computer programmer, music is my treasured retreat."

Active Arts kicks off a full Fall schedule when *Dance Downtown* offers free tango dancing in BP Hall at Walt Disney Concert Hall on September 5. Disco on the Music Center Plaza, complete with mirror-ball and the sounds of Donna Summer, follows on September 19. Wear your polyester best!

A Taste of Dance, celebrating LA's diverse dance cultures with mini-lessons throughout the day, is slated for September 20.

Active Arts celebrates LA's annual Grand Avenue Festival on September 28 with a musical showcase by *Get Your Chops Back* flute, guitar, and saxophone ensembles. Throughout the day, drum circles from *Drum Downtown* will invigorate Grand Avenue's street energy.

LA Storytellers reconvenes in October to explore its love of the spoken word. That leads to our holiday line-up: the third annual *Jingle Bell Sing* project in November/December and *Holiday Sing-Along* on the Music Center Plaza on December 19.

Throughout the season, please check for updates of Active Arts programs and schedules at musiccenter.org. And... be active!

— Debra Levine