

Arts & Entertainment

Saxophonist long in tune with passion for music

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**

The Champion

While many young boys dream of being cops or firemen, Chris Willes knew pretty early on he was destined for something different.

"Ever since I was little, I figured I'd go into music," said the 18-year-old tenor saxophone player.

If 'going into music' means participating in music festivals around the world, studying under a Juno award-winning leader and being accepted into the University of Toronto's jazz performance program, it's pretty safe to say Mr. Willes was right.

To say music has taken him places he never would have gone otherwise is an understatement.

Just this month, Mr. Willes embarked on a whirlwind trip to several music festivals including the North Sea Jazz Festival in The Hague, the Netherlands, from which he returned last week.

"It's the biggest indoor jazz festival in the world," said Mr. Willes, who has lived in Milton since he was three years old.

Mr. Willes performed with five other high school students, all who attend the Humber College Community Music School, a weekly music program for young musicians.

The band was granted the coveted opportunity after sending in their CD.

Mr. Willes has been studying music at the Humber program for the past two

years, and this past year has been in a band led by Kirk MacDonald, a Toronto-based saxophonist.

"He's probably one of the best sax players in Canada and the world," Mr. Willes said.

The band also played at the Distillery Festival in Toronto last month and flew straight to the Atlantic Jazz Festival in Halifax, N.S., from the Netherlands.

"We got to Halifax a few days before we had to play, so we just relaxed."

In the Ottawa Jazz Festival, in which Mr. Willes also played this month, he was awarded the Galaxy Rising Star Award, which comes with a cash prize of \$2,000.

"I thought it was great," he said, but admitted, "We were more into the music (than the money)."

He said the money will go toward his tuition at U of T, where he'll be studying this fall.

First took vocal lessons

Mr. Willes' first instrument was none other than his own voice. As a child he was always singing, said his mother, Penny Willes.

She enrolled him in a music program for toddlers, and then in private vocal lessons. It didn't take long until he caught the musical theatre bug, Ms Willes said, and at the age of 10, Mr. Willes started getting leads in various community theatre productions.

But when his voice changed, that chapter ended and Mr. Willes discovered a new-found passion for instrumental music.

Mr. Willes first started playing tenor saxophone in grade school when it came time

for him to choose an instrument for his music class. There was no looking back from there.

Ms Willes said she and Chris' father, Bob, couldn't be happier about his chosen path.

Since they're both avid jazz fans, Ms Willes said it's nice to be able to go to jazz clubs as a family without their son being embarrassed.

She stressed it's been her son's hard work and ambition that have gotten him where he is.

Although she and her husband have been supportive every step of the way, she said they've never pushed him to do anything he didn't want to. Ms Willes said she thinks it's important that parents let their children discover their own passions in life.

"I don't believe you can force the arts onto your children," she said.

To young students harbouring the same dreams he had of becoming a musician, Mr. Willes offered this advice: "Just listen to lots of music. If you're into jazz, listen to jazz. Listen to as many different types as possible. It'll make you, as a musician, more interesting."

Next Friday, Mr. Willes will perform at Manhattans Jazz Bistro in Guelph with four other musicians from the Humber program.

For more information, visit www.manhattans.ca.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com.



Chris Willes, 18, of Milton is keeping busy performing at area festivals and jazz clubs. Next Friday, he can be seen at Manhattans Jazz Bistro in Guelph.

Theatre camp for youths at fairgrounds has spots open

Are you hearing the proverbial 'I'm bored' phrase from your kids a little too often this summer?

Milton Youth Theatre Productions still has spots open for its 'Theatre in the Park' summer camp.

Taking place at the Milton Fair Grounds, the drama camp is for kids aged five to 12 and runs until August 13. There are one and two-week sessions from which to choose.

Every second week ends with a variety

show performed by campers.

Spots are still available for the session beginning Monday, as well as the following weeks.

Just what does the camp include?

"Anything from vocal to drama, improv, musical theatre, song and dance," said director Kim Belvedere.

The fairgrounds venue has proven invaluable, since it allows for both indoor and outdoor activity, Ms Belvedere said.

And although drama is the camp's focus, there's a little something for everyone, Ms Belvedere said. There are outdoor sports,

and each Friday is the camp's Fun Water Day.

The next variety show will be held Thursday from 6 to 7 p.m. Ms Belvedere said parents interested in sending their children to any of the programs run by Milton Youth Theatre Productions are welcome to attend, as well as people just looking for a little summer evening entertainment.

The evening will include a barbecue.

"Come and watch the entertainment while you eat dinner," Ms Belvedere said, adding the show will take place in the middle of the track at the fairgrounds, located off Robert Street.

For more information, call Kim Belvedere at (905) 875-7674 or visit www.miltontheatre.ca.

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