

DEL MAR TIMES

Students make Latin Connection

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By Marti Gacioch

It's not unusual for teenage boys to play in a band, but 15-year-old Chase Morrin not only plays in several different types of bands, he performs professionally with all of them throughout San Diego County.

Morrin, a piano-playing sophomore at Canyon Crest Academy, recently performed with his band, the ***Latin Connection Quintet***

at Dizzy's in San Diego. The group will play their monthly gig Nov. 21 at Starbucks at Fifth and F streets in downtown San Diego and Dec. 5 they will perform at The Book Works and Pannikin in Del Mar.

Other members of the ***Latin Connection Quintet*** include Morrin's four friends: drummer David James, 14; Michael Valentini, 17, on bass; Daniel Feldman, 15, who plays percussion (congas and cowbells); and Chris Burgess, 16, on tenor sax.

"We've known each other for a long time, but we formed the Latin jazz band just a few months ago," Morrin said.

Morrin started taking piano lessons with Svetlana Pikos at age 9. After three years with her, he studied with Kenny Ard. He now studies with Rick Helzer, who teaches at San Diego State University.

A diversified piano player, Morrin enjoys playing all styles of music and has ample energy to perform in more than one band. He plays piano with an adult jazz trio that includes Brian Wright on bass and Bob Daniels on drums. And he's also in a funk and rock music band called Minor Groove, along with David James on drums and Daniel Oldham on bass.



Left to right: Michael Valentini, David James, Chase Morrin, Daniel Feldman and Chris Burgess of the ***Latin Connection Quintet***.
Photos Courtesy of Chase Morrin



Chase Morrin, pictured playing the keyboard on the right, performs with his band, the ***Latin Connection Quintet***.

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And as if that wasn't music enough for any teenager, Morrin substitutes in an adult Big Band orchestra and also plays in a youth Big Band group of 17 members.

"Our kid Big Band group is called the Jazz Ensemble and we have the best kid players from all over San Diego," he said. "The director gets us gigs at La Jolla parties, and we went to the Monterey Jazz Festival last year and will play there again April 2009."

Morrin not only plays in two gigs a week, he is also playing piano in two local musicals over the next two months: "South Pacific" at Canyon Crest Academy and "Cats" at the San Diego Junior Theatre.

An avid (and prolific) composer, Morrin has written about 100 compositions for classical settings, trio pieces, Big Band sounds and percussion ensembles. This summer, he spent a month at Inner Spark band camp where he played everything from African drumming to Balinese music, Turkish music, contemporary jazz, classical and rock.

"I've really tried to broaden my musical scope a lot," Morrin said. "I've done computer contemporary stuff and have composed for different kinds of ensembles and classical stuff like solo harp."

Far from being just musically talented, Morrin also excels academically. He is currently taking two advanced placement classes (world history and calculus) and is on the math, speech and debate teams. Somehow, he even makes time to tutor math students before classes start early Tuesday mornings.

So where does this bright, talented energetic teenager find the time to do everything he does?

"I power through school every day and have to finish all my homework, so I can get to all my events," he said. "I try to do my homework at school and eat and work at the same time. I'm not super organized at all, but I know how to be productive and if you're really productive, you can deal with the homework pretty easily."

For those downtime moments when his agenda is slightly less empty, Morrin plays soccer with friends or works on one of his many musical compositions. He would eventually like to work in some facet of the music industry or compose for musical theatre, movies or video games.

To learn more about Morrin and his music, visit www.chasemorrin.com.