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## Jazz Ensemble Breathes New Life Into Popular Music

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# JAZZ ENSEMBLE

## Breathes New Life into Popular Music

In its 40-plus years of existence, the Duquesne University Jazz ensemble has provided high-quality jazz concerts for its listeners. For the past several years, the group has presented special, themed concerts of more commercially popular music that have been met with great success. These concerts have paid tribute to the music of specific groups or performers such as Steely Dan; The Police and Sting; The Beatles; Stevie Wonder; Chicago; Earth, Wind & Fire; Blood, Sweat & Tears; and Tower of Power, as well as genres of music including movie and television themes. One of the more recent concerts highlighted the music of Pittsburgh's own Henry Mancini, a composer best known for writing the *Pink Panther* theme, as well as countless other television and movie themes.

This concept of stepping outside the boundaries of jazz is not a new one. During the swing era, big bands always played the hits of the day. The touring big bands of the 70s and 80s — groups led by Buddy Rich, Maynard Ferguson, and Woody Herman — also played arrangements of the popular music of that time. Today, jazz groups of all sizes have featured “pop” music in their recordings and concerts. The inclusion of commercial music in their programs brought their music to a larger audience and kept all these bands viable. The continuation of this “tradition” was an obvious choice in light of its many benefits.



Mike Tomaro, director of the Jazz Ensemble, offers his own unique twist on these themed concerts, arranging all of the music specifically for the Ensemble.

“I’ve always enjoyed listening to all types of music, and because I’ve been writing for big bands for 35 years or so, I tend to listen to music with an ear as to how it might translate to the large jazz ensemble,” he said.

According to Tomaro, the concerts consist of note-for-note transcriptions of the recorded music orchestrated for big band and jazz-oriented re-arrangements of the music—some vocal and some instrumental. “It’s always a pleasurable challenge to create these concerts and capitalize on the talents of our students,” he said. “Music I’m considering for future concerts includes that of Led Zeppelin, Queen, Foo Fighters, and Billy Joel, to name a few.”

## Incense

### AVIGAYIL DIAMOND

Singer/songwriter Avi Diamond (B.S. Music Therapy, 2014) has released her first EP, *Down the Drain*—a collection of her original jazz-inspired alternative rock songs.

“I have been dreaming of recording my original music for a long time,” Diamond said, “and hearing the songs that I have been living with for years come to life with the sounds and interpretations of other artists has been amazing.”

She is also working on a full-length CD, which will be released in 2015.

Diamond keeps her Duquesne ties close to her heart, working frequently with Mary Pappert School of Music students and alumni, including senior piano performance student Alec Chapman, bassist Ava Lintz (B.A. Performance, 2014), percussionist Josh Dick (B.A. Performance, 2014), and guitarist Michael Borowski (M.M. Performance, 2012). Diamond’s *Down the Drain* EP was recorded by Madeleine Campbell (B.A. Music Technology, 2013) at Treelady Studios near Pittsburgh.

Among her musical influences is former Mary Pappert School of Music faculty member, Maureen Budway, who passed away in January 2015. “(Budway) was a huge influence for me at Duquesne. She challenged me to learn jazz in its original style instead of making it into pop music as many modern artists have done. She always pushed me to try new things even when I didn’t think I could, and she was very supportive of my performance career.”

In January, Diamond began a music therapy internship at The Center for Discovery, a therapeutic boarding school in upstate New York for children and adults with special needs.

“I want to get my board certification as a music therapist and work in that field,” Diamond said. “I am also interested in performing my original music and going on tour within the next few years.”

*Down the Drain* can be downloaded at [avidiamond.bandcamp.com](http://avidiamond.bandcamp.com).