

Arts & Entertainment

Westfield High School Funksters Implore Crowds To Get On Bus

By MEREDITH MANNINO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Westfield High School's funkadelic band The Bus is moving fast and steady, fueled by rhythm, talent and dedication.

The band is comprised of four George Clinton-inspired musicians and high school juniors: Jon Fichter (singer and guitarist), Will Harbaugh (bassist), Michael Risberg (guitarist) and Gabe Yukon (drummer). The band mentioned Funkadelic, Jimi Hendrix, Red Hot Chili Peppers and The Meters as other musical influences. Their funky, fun and groovy style certainly exemplifies these influences.

The Bus recently won The Battle of the Bands where they were chosen out of approximately 16 other bands from Union County.

At a recent gig at The Crossroads in Garwood, the gifted funk musicians opened for the well-known Hudson River Rats, and amazed the crowd. All fabulous musicians with electrifying stage presence, their energy is vibrant, youthful and refreshing. The audience never once stopped dancing to their fun and very tight funk beats, which, with the exception of a few covers, were all original tunes.

The Bus is truly a well-oiled machine, led by Jon's stellar and strong voice, which has a David Byrne (Talking Heads) sound to it.

"I don't really sing. I speak with notes," he explained. As the lead singer, Jon also has a very engaging stage presence, which is key as the band's front man. He didn't mention how long he's been singing, but said he's played guitar for six or seven years.

Will's bass playing is quite remarkable, keeping everything tight and strong. He's been playing bass since the fourth grade. Michael, who's played for about four years, is an excellent guitarist as well; he busts out groovy funkadelic riffs that are extremely exhilarating.

Gabe displays innate talent on the drums, but said he has only "seriously" committed to playing recently.

"I've been fooling around (with music) all my life, but seriously for about two years," the drummer explained.

Musical talent is certainly in Gabe's blood. His father is Howard Yukon, a member of reggae band Blue Riddim. With his musical knowledge and experience, Howard has mentored the boys, and produced their CD in his Austin, Tex. studio. The CD, which is filled with non-stop tunes, is a must listen and very addicting.

Even though Howard has been a great teacher for The Bus, son Gabe says his dad's presence was not overbearing.

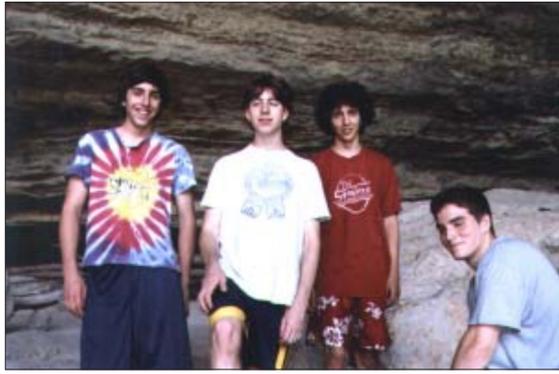
"He helps us out but he stays out of the way," said Gabe.

All four band members commented on Howard's influence.

"He's really important in terms of where we are today in terms of discipline, preparation and stage presence," said Will. He added that Howard instilled in The Bus the importance of constant practice.

"Our practices have purpose," Will added.

All of his band mates agreed. "They (the rehearsals) are near military in their precision," com-



BUS LOAD...Inspired by everything from The Chili Peppers and Hendrix, Westfield High School funkadelic band The Bus has impressed recently with their eclectic funk. Pictured from left to right are Mike Risberg, Gabe Yukon, Jon Fichter and Will Harbaugh.

mented Jon.

Gabe and his family recently moved back to Austin, Tex., where they lived prior to relocating to Westfield. But Gabe came back from time to time, and of course if there is a tri-state gig, he's there. The band is hoping to play in Austin, and the boys all mentioned moving to the very musical city after graduating high school in 2007.

Whether it's in Texas or Jersey, the Bus gives a thrilling performance either way. It's a guaranteed fun time and groove-filled, funkadelic event.

For more information about The Bus and upcoming gigs, check out their webpage at myspace.com/thebusives.

WF Dancer Studies Moves, Style Of Fosse

WESTFIELD — Westfield resident Caroline Yost attended a recent Master Dance Class conducted by the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ PAC) to learn the style and moves of Bob Fosse.

The Master Class focused on Fosse's choreography in the stellar number "All That Jazz" from the show *Chicago*. It was taught by Gelan Lambert, a NJ PAC Young Artist Institute teaching artist, and was conducted at Sharon Miller's Academy for the Performing Arts in Montclair.

Mr. Lambert, a featured performer in the national tour of *Fosse*, is currently a member of the Martha Graham Dance Company and the Sean Curran Company.

The national touring company production of *Chicago* opens at NJ PAC in Newark on Tuesday, March 28 and runs through Sunday, April 2. Tickets are available by calling 1-800-GO-NJ PAC or may be purchased on line at www.njpac.org.



Caroline Yost

Splash of Thai- Great Décor, Fun- Doesn't Disappoint

By KEREN SCHULTZ
3 stars (out of 5)

WESTFIELD — Over the past couple of years Westfield's cuisine has been diversifying and with that our standards for good ambience and food have grown higher. The latest addition is Splash of Thai.

From outside, it's inconspicuous — but once you open the door, you can tell that presentation is Chef Vichaya Samanjit's first priority. The décor is trendy, soft and inviting and the large aquarium behind the hostess displays bright sapphire, gold and ginger-colored fish.

The first time we came, a Saturday night around 8 p.m., we couldn't get in. Literally. People were standing outside in the cold waiting; the small waiting room was filled to capacity. We peeked in and scurried off, agreeing to make a reservation the next week.

The following Saturday, the restaurant was still crowded and a reservation didn't help our situation. The hostess, in a frenzy seemed to be everywhere in the room at once, unapologetically promising our table in about 25 minutes, which made our party question why we bothered making a reservation in the first place. We huddled around the aquarium at 9:30 p.m., ravenous, ready to eat just about anything, when finally we were directed to a table.

Finally seated, the service was warm and friendly and we received our food promptly. The Splash Samplers were good — a nice start for two: they included Chicken Sate, Spring Rolls, Mee Krob and Golden Curry Puff. The Golden Curry Puff stood out as a small dumpling-like mixture of ground chicken, sweet potato, carrot, red onion and curry, simply delicious. The flavors inside the soft doughy pockets were an explosion of sweet and spicy, thanks largely to just a hint of curry. We also tried the Rare Tuna Spring Rolls and we all agreed that this is a valiant attempt to ride the tuna craze — but the dish just doesn't work. The flaky fried roll overwhelms the palate and the rare tuna seems to disappear after the initial bite. The seaweed salad served on the side, however, was a delicious addition.

Pad Thai is usually a good dish to test the kitchen of any Thai restaurant and with this, the kitchen did not fail us. The stir-fried rice noodles were delicious and the taste of peanut wasn't over or underwhelming — it was just right. The Drunken Noodles

By BRAD TINFOW
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — The Mostly Music series, hosted by violinist Ani Kavafian and cellist Carter Brey, features monthly chamber music concerts at the Morrow Memorial Methodist Church in Maplewood and Temple Emanuel in Westfield. Both concerts are performed on the same Sunday, one at 2:30 p.m., and the other at 7:30 p.m. On March 12, I attended the evening concert in Westfield.

Ms. Kavafian did not participate in this performance due to a scheduling conflict. Violinists Sheryl Staples and Catherine Cho, violist Cynthia Phelps, harpist Nancy Allen, flutist Carol Wincenc, and clarinetist Charles Neidich joined Mr. Brey.

The printed program contained the musicians' résumés. All are very impressive. Many hold principal chairs in the New York Philharmonic, and some have permanent faculty positions. All have busy international careers as chamber musicians and/or soloists.

With its comfortable theatre seating, a capacity of perhaps 250, and superb acoustics, the Temple is a perfectly intimate venue for chamber music.

The concert had an air of informality, as Mr. Brey remarked briefly about

the all-French program and some of the guest artists. Flutist Carol Wincenc also made some general comments about the pieces in the first half of the program, none of which were familiar to me.

Ms. Wincenc, Ms. Phelps and Ms. Allen performed the first two works on the program. They began with *Two Interludes* for flute, viola, and harp, by Ibert. The first of these was a pretty, melodic piece in which the harp sounded a bit like a 12-string guitar. The second was more energetic with a Spanish flavor. The flute and viola tossed the melody back and forth, with the harp again imitating a guitar, but more characteristically.

The second piece, the *Trio for Flute, Viola and Harp* by Debussy, was flavored with whole tone scales and melodies built on perfect fourths, alternating with more tonally grounded sections. The first movement, "Pastorale," began slowly and mysteriously with a good deal of tonal ambiguity. There were contrasting sections of more diatonic harmony and many fluctuations in tempo. The second movement, "Interlude," in a minuet tempo, gave the audience the first taste of the harp's trademark *glissandi*. The "Finale" sounded like a piano toccata, with *ostinato* accompanying figures. It was rapid, highly chromatic and exciting. The instrumentalists made the technically difficult passages look easy.

The final work in the first half featured the *Introduction and Allegro for Flute, Clarinet, String Quartet and Harp* by Ravel. The larger ensemble, which included all the musicians present, allowed for a rich, sensuous harmony underneath clearly discernible melody. The flute and clarinet would play the melody in parallel thirds, alternating with the viola and cello doing the same. In this piece, the harp was allowed much more of a central role as a full, if not the lead, partner in the musical proceedings. The development section of the *Allegro* culminated in a cadenza for the harpist, who played the melody in plucked octaves with her left hand while accompanying herself with *glissandi* in the right hand.



Linda B. Condrillo for The Westfield Leader and The Times
VARIETY SHOW...Musical siblings, from left to right, Jenna, Vito and Nicholas Brancatella of Mountainside, love their violins. They will perform at the Deerfield Middle School's Variety Revue this Friday, March 31.

It's Curtains for Deerfield School's Gymnasium

By LINDA B. CONDRILLO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

MOUNTAINSIDE — With any luck, when the curtain goes down Friday night at the conclusion of Deerfield Middle School's Variety Revue, it will be for the very last time. This year's proceeds from the Mountainside Education Foundation's fundraiser will be used to replace the tired and tattered stage curtain, which has been in disrepair for quite some time.

The annual event has been wowing audiences with local talent since the beginning of the new millennium. The show continues to be dedicated to the memory of Dawn Ciasulli, mother of four Deerfield alumni. Laurie Kaplan of the Mountainside Education Foundation told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*, "Dawn was a beloved member of the community who helped get the first show off the ground. She was always such a big proponent and lover of the arts, and was full of talent herself. She helped the stage come to life, donating her time and ability to help organize practically everything."

In her younger days, Mrs. Ciasulli was a folk guitarist and vocalist at Our Lady of Lourdes Church. After marrying her childhood sweetheart, Tommy Ciasulli, the couple stayed in town and raised four children. Her daughter, Kassi Ciasulli-Garcia, told the *Leader* and the *Times*, "My mom and dad lived on the same block. My dad is one of 12 children and she used to babysit for his family. He used to

This resulted in two distinct layers of sound. Ms. Allen's technical mastery was astonishing, and the musical effect was breathtakingly beautiful.

After the intermission Ms. Staples, Ms. Cho, Ms. Phelps and Mr. Brey collaborated in the Quartet for Strings by Ravel. This piece is part of the standard repertoire and has been recorded by most major string quartets.

Most notable in this performance was the tightness of the ensemble and unity of concept. All four instrumentalists were well matched, with the second violin having plenty to do, often having the thematic material with the first violin playing "second fiddle." Every passing of a line from one instrument to the other was smooth as silk, each duet in thirds or sixths played as if by one mind.

The effect was a flawless and electrifying cascade of beautiful sound with purpose and meaning, generated by real-time awareness, understanding, and passion for the music.

I mention the unity of concept as being noteworthy in this piece, but it was here where it just was so starkly apparent, as all the instruments in the same family spoke with one voice. The preceding pieces were performed in the same vein, with clear, shared purpose.

Such high caliber of performance can only happen when individuals are brought together with similar prerequisites. They must have exceptional talent, years of study and performing experience and a common understanding of music making. Most of all they must share an insatiable curiosity and total commitment to the music they are playing, from one moment to the next.

It is this spirit and love of the art — a feeling that cannot be fabricated — that elevates the performance of the music on the page to a living, breathing thing. It lives briefly through the musicians, speaks through their hearts and minds out to members of the audience, who, if receptive and aware, can share that feeling.

Such was the case on March 12, when Mostly Music performed marvelously well to an appreciative audience that it was a privilege to be a part of.

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