

Jazz fans have day in the sun

IN 2ND YEAR, \$5 ENTRY FEE FINDS GROWING ACCEPTANCE AT FESTIVAL

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Charlie Davis, left, and, Erica Roser, dance to the Latin jazz at the Salsa...

Tapping her foot to the beat, Nita Willis sliced strawberries Saturday to the funky rhythm of the saxophone blaring from the stage in front of her food booth. But soon an important visitor came by and stopped her rhythm.

"Gerald!" Willis called out, spotting jazz musician Gerald Albright in the long line of jazz fans waiting for one of her baked sweets.

"He's a big fan of my peach cobbler," laughed Willis, whose San Jose bakery, Nita Bees Tastys, has gained a following among musicians and fans alike at the San Jose Jazz Festival.

The warm sun and hot jazz attracted thousands to downtown San Jose Saturday. Crowds sprawled out in lawn chairs in front of the main stage on San Fernando Street.

"They keep bringing out the best artists," said Linda Burton of San Jose, who's attended the festival for the past five years. Burton came early with her sister and their aunt, who was visiting from Texas, to stake out a spot on the lawn to see Albright.

This summer marks the second year festival organizers have charged a \$5 entry fee to what was once billed as the country's biggest free jazz festival. Organizers originally feared the fee would cause a dip in attendance, but although an official tally wasn't released by Saturday evening, the thousands who showed up didn't seem to mind the fee.

"I'm so glad they decided to put the \$5 fee. It's brought a whole new caliber of people to the festival," said Burton. "It's nice to see everyone so calm and peaceful listening to the music."

Jazz-goers who wanted a respite from the heat visited the air-conditioned Future of Jazz stage inside the Tech Museum of Innovation. The stage featured up-and-coming jazz stars from around the Bay Area who had competed in the San Jose Jazz Society's Youth Jazz Festival earlier in the year.

Sixteen-year old Lynbrook High School student Scott Takahashi, along with his eponymous trio, played an hour set to a full house. The crowd bobbed their heads along to "Oleo," an the upbeat Sonny Rollins tune.

"It took awhile to appreciate (jazz)," said Takahashi, who also plays piano and who credits his love of jazz to participation in the jazz society's summer jazz camp.

"I'm not inspired by one artist," he said, "but just the music itself."

The majority of the money raised at the festival funds the summer jazz camp and the society's other music education programming.

"We're about planting the seeds for future musicians," said Barbara Christmann, director of education for San Jose Jazz. "We want to make sure the kids who are talented and serious little jazzers get into our camp."

While the festival attracts big-name musicians to San Jose - this year's headliners include Red Holloway, David "Fathead" Newman and Lee Ritenour - one of today's main acts is more unconventional. Wielding badges in one hand and horns in the other, members of the New York City Police Department will perform big-band tunes at 6 p.m. on the Silicon Valley stage.

"The kids are happy and the parents are happy," summed up Bill Mazurek, as he listened to jazz legend Newman. Mazurek and his family are visiting from Baltimore, and he noted with a smile: "This is way better than what we have waiting for us tomorrow back home."