

Big Easy comes to Milligan in jazz show

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MILLIGAN COLLEGE — The Milligan Jazz Ensemble will take on a little Dixieland jazz in its spring performance set for Monday. It's called "The Sounds of Mardi Gras: A tribute to the music of New Orleans."

The 7:30 p.m. performance, in Milligan's Mary B. Martin Auditorium in Seeger Memorial Chapel, will be a bit of a switch for the 24-piece ensemble, which will break into several smaller groups for various numbers. Guest performer is woodwinds artist Dr. Phil Thompson, and the

evening will be in honor of retiring Milligan president Dr. Don Jeanes and his wife, Clarinda.

After 14 years as president of Milligan, Jeanes announced last October that he will retire from the presidency July 15.

"Don and Clarinda Jeanes have always been at our concerts and they've always been very supportive of the jazz ensemble, music and the arts in general," said Rick Simerly, director of the jazz ensemble and associate professor of music at Milligan.

Admission to the concert is free.

Because most traditional New Orleans jazz bands were smaller groups, the Milligan Ensemble will shift things around, using six

different combinations of group members. The ensemble consists of Milligan students as well as students and adults from throughout the region.

"You really don't see many jazz ensemble Dixieland charts," Simerly said. "It's a lot of fun and I think the musicians are having a fun time doing it, especially since we broke into small groups, but it's also been a lot of work for them."

"This whole concert stems from one arrangement, 'South Rampart Street Parade,' that's very interesting and complex, that was arranged by Billy May, and then Bill Scott adapted it for us. I just loved the arrangement and thought it would be a good thing

to base a concert around.

"It takes the perspective of a bystander at a parade who hears all these themes and marches and different bands as the parade goes by. One blends into another and it's sort of a smorgasbord of sounds. And the main tune within it is great."

Thompson is professor of music at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, S.C., where he teaches woodwinds and directs the jazz program. He earned his doctor of musical arts degree in multiple woodwind performance at the University of North Texas and has performed throughout the United States with jazz greats Ella Fitzgerald, Benny Goodman, Clark Terry, Sarah Vaughan,

Nancy Wilson, Ray Charles, Harry Connick Jr., Natalie Cole, Lou Rawls and numerous others.

He has performed with dozens of Broadway musicals including "Wicked," "The Producers," "Spamalot," "Hairspray," "42nd Street," "Chicago," "Little Shop of Horrors," "Beauty and the Beast," "AIDA," "Ragtime" and others. As a clinician for Conn-Selmer Inc., Thompson performs clinics and concerts throughout the United States.

"Phil's a dear friend of mine and we've played together many times," Simerly said. "He's a phenomenal woodwind performing artist. His main thing is saxophone and he's absolutely great, but he plays all the woodwinds so

well — flute, clarinet, bassoon, oboe, tenor sax, alto sax. He's as much at home playing a Mozart concerto as a John Coltrane solo.

"He's in demand in Charlotte because of all the Broadway musicals that come into town, and they call him to contract the bands for them. We're honored to have him playing."

It will also be the first performance for the Milligan Jazz Ensemble in Seeger since the auditorium was renovated. What was considered one of the best acoustic halls in the area is now even better.

For more information about the concert, call 461-8723 or email music@milligan.edu.