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Students of note

All-State musical ensembles and Honors Jazz Choir put on a dazzling show
YOUNG & TALENTED

By **ALLISON [FREEMAN](#)**
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

In the three years Jun Yoo has been a member of the New Jersey All-State Mixed Chorus, he has never sung the same voice part. Jun, a 17-year-old senior at Morris Knolls High School in Rockaway, started as a tenor 1 two years ago. His voice changed to a tenor 2 last year and he became baritone this year.

"I have been all the voice parts," Jun said during a chorus rehearsal break in Atlantic City last week. "Every year, I am forced to meet new people because I am in a different group each time."

Jun said he liked being a tenor 1 because "the tenor voice seems the most angelic," but he is also pleased this year because "the baritone always has the melody."

Jun was one of 350 high school students in the mixed chorus. The chorus and 134-student New Jersey All-State Orchestra, representing the best high school singers and classical musicians in New Jersey, spent three days rehearsing at the Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall last week before performing a joint concert last Friday. The groups will also perform Sunday at Prudential Hall at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark.

The 18-member All-State Jazz Ensemble rehearsed at the Black Box Theatre at Trump Plaza in Atlantic City last week before performing a concert with the New Jersey Honors Jazz Choir. The choir has 17 singers and four instrumental musicians. The groups will perform again together tonight at NJPAC's Victoria Theater.

The rehearsals and concerts in Atlantic City are held in conjunction with the annual New Jersey Education Association convention and are sponsored by the New Jersey Music Educators Association. The jazz groups are also sponsored by the New Jersey Association For Jazz Education.

Thousands of students audition for regional choruses and orchestras in the northern, central and southern regions of the state. The best students in those groups are then permitted to audition for All-State. About 100 students auditioned for the Honors Jazz Choir last spring, but it is not considered an All-State group.

After two years in the group, Jun of Rockaway said he was prepared for his third and final year in All-State. "I learned that I need to sleep at night and be prepared for the rehearsals," he said, recalling those years when he stayed up late with his friends. The rehearsals can be grueling, lasting as many as 11 hours per day. Katie Hoyer, a 17-year-old senior from Kittatinny Regional High School in Newton, said conductor Z. Randall Stroope taught the chorus to darken their sound. "This way we sound a little bit older," she said. "A lot of us come into this as solo singers and when you sing with such a large group, we have to learn to become one voice."

J.P. Stevens High School in Edison had more students in the choir and orchestra this year than any other school, with 15 singers in the mixed chorus and 10 musicians in the orchestra. Kirk Geritano, a 17-year-old junior and baritone in the chorus, said "it is a good representation of how well things work in the J.P. Stevens Music Department. It is a privilege to be here and be considered one of the best singers in the state."

The hours and hours of rehearsals can take a toll. "I could really use a massage right now - I feel pretty stiff," said Megan Feibusch, a 17-year-old senior and bassoonist from Mountain Lakes High School as she rubbed her back during a rehearsal of the All-State Orchestra. Megan said she planned to stop at one of the massage chairs in a Boardwalk mall during the orchestra's lunch break.

Flute player Deborah Gold from Metuchen High School agreed with Megan, but also said the hours of rehearsals paid off. "The rehearsals are really exhausting, but they make you feel energized in a way because you feel like you have improved a lot," said Deborah, a 17-year-old senior.

Just down the Boardwalk at the Trump Plaza, students in the All-State Jazz Ensemble prepared for their concert, which was held Nov. 6. The group rehearsed its music and then its joint piece with the Jazz Honors Choir.

That night, the groups performed separately. Then they came together for the 90-minute concert's finale with Edgar Sampson and Benny Goodman's standard "Don't Be That Way."

"Jazz music is a way of looking at life differently," said Travis Alexander, an 18-year-old senior at Hanover Park High School and a member of the Jazz Honors Choir. "It is a different language from what you usually hear."

The choir members did lots of scatting with several pieces arranged by conductor Justin Binek, director of vocal jazz studies at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. The ensemble members also did improvisation, working with conductor Anthony D.J. Brinker, conductor of University Jazz Ensembles at Princeton University.

Tenor sax player Benjamin Kovacs, a 17-year-old senior at Morristown High School, said the ensemble "inspires me and challenges me. We share ideas of how we approach music."

"You get to play music not necessarily written for a high school band, music more for professionals," said Allison Philips, a trumpet player in the ensemble and a 16-year-old junior at Columbia High School in Maplewood.

At the All-State Orchestra and All-State Mixed Chorus concert last Friday at Boardwalk Hall, highlights included the orchestra's rendition of Stravinsky's "Firebird Suite" and the choir's "The Conversion of Saul," composed by conductor Stroope, director of choral studies at Rowan University. The orchestra was conducted by Rosalind Erwin.

For full lists of the students in the four ensembles, visit nj.com.

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PHOTO CAPTION: 1. Also rehearsing in Atlantic City: the All-State Orchestra, left, and the New Jersey Honors Chorus. 2. The All-State Mixed Chorus sports a variety of footwear as they rehearse in Atlantic City. Below, Joseph Peri, 17, handles the drums for the All-State Jazz Ensemble. 3. Left, Rob Swersky of Parsippany Hills High School rehearsing with the All-State Jazz Ensemble at Trump Plaza. 4. Right, the Honors Jazz Chorus also rehearsed at Trump Plaza. 5. Also rehearsing in Atlantic City: the All-State Orchestra, left, and the New Jersey Honors Chorus. **CREDIT:** PHOTOS BY NOAH ADDIS/THE STAR-LEDGER