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KCOY

Cuesta Night Band

SAN LUIS OBISPO - Monday night is the one night that professional musicians don't usually play gigs. So what do some top Central Coast jazz musicians do on their night off? They drive from all over San Luis Obispo County and beyond to Cuesta College to play in the Cuesta Night Band. This 18-piece band is regarded as the best big band on the Central Coast.

At Cuesta, these musicians have the rare opportunity to play the music they love with other top-notch players. Together, they sharpen their skills and enjoy the fellowship of others who have devoted much of their lives to music.

The band continues a tradition that was initiated more than 30 years ago by faculty members of the Cuesta College Performing Arts Department. A few of the original band members still play in the Cuesta Night Band.

The backgrounds of the band members are as varied and interesting as the music they play. Most are professional musicians, some of whom are on the faculty of Cuesta's Jazz Studies Program. One left a senior executive position at a major corporation to pursue a career in music. Some band members are in professions other than music but are, nonetheless, accomplished musicians. One is a retired orthopedic surgeon. Another runs a real estate agency. Others have retired from careers in education. They all share a passion for big band music.

The Cuesta Night Band has appeared with world-class jazz musicians, including trombonists Andy Martin and Rob McConnell, trumpeter Bobby Shew, saxophonists Ernie Watts and Tom Scott, Brazilian vocalist and guitarist Teka, and local favorite vocalist Inga Swearingen. The band has performed at a variety of venues, including Cuesta College, the SLO Blues Society Jubilee by the Sea, SOhO in Santa Barbara, and the Santa Barbara Jazz Festival. The band has also been invited to play at the annual conference of the International Association for Jazz Educators in New York City - quite an honor considering the magnitude of this event.