

# IT'S ABOUT THE MUSIC!



BY LINDA EDDY AND BILL EDDY

Oh, baby — three countries, four concerts, notes flying off the page, pumping up the audiences, bringing them along with the music, a band jelling in a way they've not achieved before. Brains still buzzing from it all.

The UMKC Conservatory of Music and Dance Concert Jazz Band descended on Paris, then the Montreux Jazz Festival, and finally the North Sea Jazz Festival and ripped it up for jazz fans from around the world.

Bobby Watson, director of the Jazz Studies Program at UMKC, stands at the helm — hip, cool, beloved by the band — teacher, mentor, inspiration. A guy who keeps making his mark on the world of jazz and teaching those he's come to care so much about how to make their own marks.

Michael Pagan, assistant director, making a major contribution to the success of the Jazz Studies Program, bringing his expertise as a composer, arranger and leader — a pianist with big chops, a big heart, and an endearing sense of humor.

Fans caught up in the moment by fresh, inventive sounds: compositions and arrangements by Bobby Watson, Michael Pagan, Pamela Baskin Watson, Oliver Nelson, Paul McKee, Wayne Shorter, Edward Simon, David Jones, and Clint Ashlock. The Concert Jazz Band distinguished itself from the pack by a repertoire that tantalized and energized, new works from creative minds, rather than stock arrangements that are the standard for many col-

lege bands. Then there was also the matter of how the band played — they just blew people away. An admirer in Switzerland said, "I can't believe they're a college band!" As Bobby Watson said "It's about the music" and it was, in every way.

A band celebrating what they're accomplishing together, and feeling a little bittersweet with Ryan Culbertson, Clint Ashlock, and John Thieben completing degrees and moving on to new adventures. Excitement for Kevin Cerovich off to test his mettle at two world jazz trombone competitions in England, already achieving a level of greatness by being one of the three finalists in the competitions.

Members of Jazz Friends sharing in the excitement, loving the sounds, bursting with pride, getting to know the band members. What a thrill to hear the band play at the foot of the Eiffel Tower on the Champs de Mars, with the wonder that is Paris surrounding us; on the Parc Vernex and Rouvenaz stages at the Montroux Jazz Festival held on the gorgeous shore of Lake Geneva, soaking up the sun and the ambience; and finally at one of the world's biggest jazz happenings, the North Sea Jazz Festival in Rotterdam where tens of thousands listened to the likes of McCoy Tyner, Branford Marsalis, Herbie Hancock, and Wayne Shorter, with thirteen different venues featuring music simultaneously.

It felt so good to see the crowds swell because the word was out that this was the band to hear, to listen to their comments, hear the applause. Fans