

# “Doc” Tucker Retires: Esteemed Educator Put Cal Berkeley on the International Jazz Map

by John Kuzmich, Jr.  
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After fifteen years at the helm, Dr. David “Doc” Tucker, the director of the award-winning UC Jazz Ensembles, has stepped down to pursue other interests. An accomplished jazz and classical trombone player and Tahoe pit musician in his own right, Doc took a student-run program in 1970 and turned it around until it had both a national reputation and an international reputation while establishing himself as a first-rate educator at the elementary school, high school, and college level, clinician, and winner of multiple citations and honors.

Tucker came to the University of California (Berkeley) campus in 1969 as an arranger and assistant director for the Cal Marching Band. He was approached by members of the Cal Band to direct the student jazz band, which was struggling with lack of modern music and practice facility. “They were rehearsing the vintage arrangement of ‘Brownsville Express,’ ” laughed Tucker when I called him to interview him for this article.

## **Cal Berkeley Jazz**

After a year of full-time direction of the Cal Band, Tucker accepted the post of full-time director of the jazz program. It was one of three activities, with the Cal Band and the choral department, under Student Musical activities. “We had an incredible reservoir of talent,” he recalled. “We had guys ready to step in to be lead trumpet, lead alto and lead tenor, and too many drummers to count. Then vocalists from the campus appeared and we had beaucoup talent,” he said.



*“Doc” Tucker in rehearsal with Freddie Hubbard for an appearance at the Pacific Coast Jazz Festival, 1975.*

In fact, Cal Berkeley had had no jazz instruction whatsoever. Those interested in jazz had formed their own groups, including the well-regarded Lee Schipper Quintet. But Tucker now provided a focus.

Within several years student demand to participate in the program led to the creation of two additional big bands, combos, and instructional classes. When Cal Northridge dropped sponsorship of the Pacific Coast Collegiate Jazz Festival regional of the American Collegiate Jazz Festival, Doc took over. From a festival barely staying alive, it became the largest of the ACJ Festivals and kept the American festival alive financially.

“We had a student-run administration for the jazz ensembles and a separate student-run administration for the jazz festival. I was fortunate to have a lot of talented kids, both in music and in business administration,” Tucker told me. Remarkably, the festival turned profits. Tucker expanded the program, renamed the Pacific Coast Jazz Festival, to include high school musicians and it became a major recruiting tool for Cal Berkeley.

The PCJF at Cal Berkeley drew hundreds of bands from the west coast, including Nevada, Washington, and Oregon. The guest stars and clinicians read like a who’s who of jazz: Sonny Rollins, Freddie Hubbard, Ed Shaughnessy, Hubert Laws, Flora Purim, Joe Henderson, Bobby McFerrin, Bill Evans, John Heard, George Duke, and others. Tucker knew many from his performing days in Tahoe; others readily accepted his invitation to participate. All-day clinics, guest performances, and the band competitions led to feature articles throughout the Bay Area and Southern California and the attendance of professional music critics.

“I remember one writer for the (San Francisco) *Examiner* staring at me,” Tucker recalled. “I thought he was going to slam me big time, but then he said, and I’ll never forget this, ‘You’re a miracle worker, Doc.’ I should have said ‘thanks’ but I simply told him the truth, that it wasn’t me but the kids.”

### **Foreign Tours**

The first tier band, the Wednesday Night Band, was sponsored by the government of Poland to travel to Poland to perform at Katowice University in 1979 and the Montreux Jazz Festival arranged for the group to perform as the featured collegiate band during the trip and paid for its travel to Switzerland. The total trip lasted four weeks, with other sponsored-appearances in the four Scandanavian countries. Tucker had formed a friendship with Japanese dignitaries during their educational trip to Berkeley, and the prefectures of Okayama and Hyogo jointly sponsored the group on a Japanese tour during 1981. The group received critical acclaim and a last-minute concert was arranged by the sponsors at the Japanese major league baseball Korakuen Stadium. A Japanese record producer teamed with Tucker for a recording session at Polydor Studios in Tokyo which resulted in the remarkable *Orange Blossom Special* album. The success of the tour led to an unprecedented invitation for a college band, an invitation and sponsorship to return to Japan in 1984, Tucker’s last full-time year as director.

The greatest measure of success is imitation. With his success as an educator and the phenomenal success of PCJF under his leadership, the Cal Band itself, losing musicians to the jazz ensembles, formed its own jazz band. It folded after a year. "It was a friendly competition," remembered Doc. "But by then the administration had built a dedicated rehearsal space for us, complete with offices and storage, we were performing weekly on campus and elsewhere at jazz festivals and clubs, I was being interviewed on KJAZ, I was myself a clinician at high school and college festivals, benefactors from the Bay Area were providing cash for the specialized expensive instruments and sound equipment, and high school band directors were calling me asking about scholarships for their musicians interested in jazz who wanted to come to Cal and perform with us," he said.

### **Students**

An educator's legacy is his students. And the list of those who were drawn to Cal Berkeley to perform under Tucker is distinguished, especially when you realize that no jazz instruction in the music department at Cal Berkeley existed nor exists to this day. The high school jazz musicians who came to Cal Berkeley did so because of Doc Tucker's program.

Susan Muscarella (Listen), Barry Finnerty (Airtio), Tony Garnier (Asleep at the Wheel), David Lefebvre (Don Ellis, Don Piestrup, and Bennett Friedman), Mike Wolff (Cannonball Adderly, Thad Jones-Mel Lewis, Jean Luc-Ponty, Sonny Rollins, and currently musical director for Nancy Wilson), and steel drummer Andy Narell are some of the dozens of musicians that Tucker brought to prominence. Trumpet impresario Jon Faddis was discovered at the PCJF at Cal Berkeley while playing lead with the Pleasant Hill High School group.

But more than just the jazz band students at Cal Berkeley benefited from Tucker's presence. With its great visibility, musicians of various interests came to the multi-talented Doc. Musical theatre and orchestral composer Robert Schoen approached Tucker, who instantly recognized his talent. Composer Rolf Johnson found an outlet for his modern orchestral compositions with the jazz program. Linda Goldstein, the producer of "Don't Worry, Be Happy," approached Doc as a vocalist and ended up being a top jazz producer. For the PCJF, Tucker reached out to the "legitimate" musical groups at Cal Berkeley, in particular, the symphony orchestra.

"Hubert Laws had this arrangement for the jazz festival calling for strings and a harp," recalled Doc. "Well, we didn't have any of that kind of instrumentation. So I called over to the orchestra and the next day these students all appeared ready to go." With the interest of orchestral musicians now piqued, Tucker expanded the repertoire of the band to include arrangements calling for strings and French horns.

His influence was such that eventually the high-brows in the music department granted class credit for participation in the jazz ensembles!

## **Recognition**

David Walter Tucker has received all the accolades available to a music and jazz educator. In high school he was senior class president and year book editor while winning an Illinois state-wide soloist competition for all wind instruments. At the University of Illinois he was soloist with the concert bands and principal trombone with the symphony, conductor of the Bach Festival, and president of Pi Mu Alpha, the concert band, and the Fine and Applied Arts Society.

In the service with the army he was principal trombone with the Fort Smith Symphony and directed the 5th Armored Division public relations tours and radio broadcasts. In Sacramento, he taught at the elementary, high school, where he was music department chairman, and college levels. He was director of bands at Sacramento City College and taught at Sacramento State College while being the curriculum supervisor for the Sutter Union School District. He adjudicated and was featured conductor at various jazz festivals throughout the state of California.

His numerous notable manuscript transcriptions include Rachmaninoff's Concerto #2, the Khatchaturian Concerto for Piano, the Wieniewski Concerto in D Minor, Opus 22, and the Ravel Concerto Pour La Main Gouche as well as over 70 arrangements for band.

His honors include an invitation by eastern block nations to represent the U.S. at the International Jazz Forum in Warsaw in 1980, an invitation by Waseda University (Japan) to present clinics, an invitation to the Finnish Pori Festival, winning of first places with high school and college bands and a cappella choirs at the Reno International Jazz Festivals and the Golden Empire Music Festivals, a honorary life membership in the American P.T.A., a citation by the Camellia Bowl for outstanding service, organization, and showmanship, and guest conductorships throughout Northern California, National Educational Film Festivals, and the Golden Gate Film Festivals.

He is a member of National Education Association, Music Educator's National Conference, College Band Director's National Association, for which he was California state chairman, California Teacher's Association, California Music Educator's Association, for which he was state jazz chairman, band representative and capital section president, the National Association of Jazz Educators, for which he served on the California state board, a life membership in Phi Mu Alpha, and Pi Kappa Lambda.

In addition, Tucker has received awards for his marching band arrangements and a Cal Berkeley award as an educator. With all that, I asked Doc what he thought his legacy should be. He said without hesitation, "the kids."

We tip our hats to one of the finest and most successful music and jazz educators in the country, who put Cal Berkeley on the international jazz map and who as an educator shepherded hundreds into careers, the always-smiling "Doc" Tucker. A hearty "job well done," Doc and best and beaucoup success in your new endeavor.