Arlington (January 26, 2015) - On Thursday, January 15, 2015, Post and Haller Middle School students eagerly participated in the annual Mt. Pilchuck Music Educators Association Honor Band Festival, (MPMEA) Junior Division. The concert was held at the Everett Civic Auditorium with over eighteen different schools taking part. Professor Larry Gookin of Central Washington University enthusiastically conducted.

Participants in this year’s event included: Leah Cushman, Camellia Hanna, Jordan Kelly, Skye Kelly, and Jason McGowan Honor Band members from Post Middle School with music director Mr. Kipp Otterness. Kellie Desautel, Luke Von Hollen, Sadie Hollingsworth, Samantha Poole and Alex Weaver Honor Band members from Haller Middle School with music director Mr. Joe Horsak.

Four, distinct pieces were performed. The first piece, Japanese Pictures by Kevin Mixon, was played energetically and made the audience feel as though they were listening to a traditional, Japanese drum. Hypnotic Fireflies by Brian Balmages was popular with the students because it sounded realistically like fireflies. The trumpets and flutes trilled. The sound was quite authentic. A slinky was even used to enhance the effect; while bells and marimba complemented the sporadic sounds within the piece. Ava Maria by Franz Biebl was edited by Mr. Gookin and was truly amazing! It provided a very different version to what is typically heard with vocals. As a listener one could sense the emotion behind the music. The musicians demonstrated the unique ability of expressing such depth of feeling in the music they played despite being relatively young players. The final piece, Grand Galop by Jonnie Vinson finished the evening with a bang! It made the audience feel as though they were experiencing the carefree nature of riding a carousel. The band seemed to enjoy playing it as much as the audience liked hearing it.
When speaking with Mr. Gookin, he shared that this was his final year as conductor for the MPMEA festival since he was retiring as a professor at CWU. He was asked if this last concert would be bittersweet, he replied, “No, just sweet.” Mr. Gookin genuinely enjoyed his time with these talented and tenacious musicians. A legacy has been left behind, with six of the present band teachers as former students from Central Washington University. He was proud indeed, to be a part of so much talent!

As a listener, it is hard to believe the students are mere eighth graders. They sounded incredible together, considering they did not meet formally until two nights before the concert. Thank you to the many students who participated. Thank you also to our many teachers, private lesson instructors and of course, the parents of these young musicians. Music is definitely alive and the future looks very bright!

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