

# Dr. Gene Aitken



On 25 July 2007, Dr. Aitken appeared on ABC World News direct from Erbil, Iraq, conducting the American Voices Jazz Bridges Combo and Big Band as part of a 10-day festival in the performing arts. The Houston-based American Voices organized this first-ever Iraqi Performing Arts Academy with funding from the US State Department. One of main goals of the Festival was uniting the Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds, and many other cultures and religions. In addition to working with the Jazz Bridges ensembles, he rehearsed the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra brass section for an upcoming tour. In October 2007, a follow up of this historic event was published in Jazz Times magazine with the article, *Jazz In Iraq*, by David Adler.

In June 2007, Dr. Gene Aitken received the United States top jazz education honor by being awarded the 2007 Jazz Educator of the Year by *DownBeat* magazine and the seventh inductee into the *DownBeat* Magazine Jazz Educator Hall of Fame, joining Dr. David Baker, Lawrence Berk, Bunky Green, Gary Burton, Jamey Aebersold, and George Russell.

In mid-May for the First China International Trumpet Guild, Dr. Aitken presented a jazz trumpet section master class with students from the Central Conservatory of Music as well as presenting a master class at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music for students who are majoring in jazz performance.

On 12 May 2007, Dr. Aitken conducted China's top military band, the Military Band of the Peoples' Liberation Army of China, in Beijing, for the opening of their new Concert Hall. It is the Central Government of China's own military band. In addition, he conducted master classes for over 100 Chinese wind ensemble directors on how to build and strengthen their wind ensemble programs.

Immediately after the UNC Jazz Festival, Dr. Aitken traveled to Hong Kong as Artist In Residence at the Hong Kong International School working the wind ensembles, jazz ensembles and the jazz choir. A jazz concert was presented on Saturday evening, 5 May at the HKIS auditorium.

On 28 April 2007, Dr. Aitken conducted the UNC/Greeley Jazz All Stars, sharing the evening stage with the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra. The All-Stars concert featured all premiere compositions and arrangements by members of the Jazz All-Stars and friends; H. David Caffey, Chuck Dotas, Eric Richards, Paul McKee and David Glenn.

Dr. Aitken retired in October 2006 as Director of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore, and now divides his time between Singapore, Thailand, and the United States of America. He continues to be active in Southeast Asia, China, and the United States working with students, teachers, ensembles, and administrators in both the wind ensemble and jazz areas.

Prior to his appointment at YSTCM, he was Advisor to the Director of the College of Music at Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand. At Mahidol University he established the Wind Ensemble, Symphonic Band, and Choral programs as well as helping to design curriculum for the Recording Engineering and Jazz Studies Programs and assisted in the building design of the new Multimedia Center, Music Museum, and 300-seat auditorium.

In January 2003 while at Mahidol University, Dr. Aitken co-founded one of the most exciting projects in Southeast Asia, the Southeast Asian Youth Orchestra and Wind Ensemble (SAYOWE). This concept not only furthered positive relations between the Southeast Asian countries, but also identified outstanding musicians in Myanmar, Cambodia, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. From over 500 students who auditioned in their home countries, 146 were selected and brought together in Thailand where they rehearsed and performed with a final concert at the Thailand Cultural Center in Bangkok. The SAYOWE project still continues today.

From 1976 to 2002, Dr. Aitken was Director of Jazz Studies at the University of Northern Colorado, one of the most well known jazz programs in the world. Under his direction, the UNC Jazz Studies Program received more *Down Beat* magazine awards and more National Endowment for the Arts grants than any institution of higher education in the United States. Also, UNC is the only institution of higher education in the United States to ever receive a Grammy Nomination in the Vocal Jazz area. During his tenure, Gene produced 36 record albums and compact discs under a contract with Los Angeles-based, United Jazz Artists Records. Four of the *Hot* vocal jazz recordings, *Hot II*, *Hot III*, *Hot IV*, and *Hot V* have just been re-released on CD by United Jazz Artists.

He has authored over 30 articles for national and international journals on jazz education and computer technology, and has had several musical compositions published through Kendor Music. In June 1997, the National Education Association published a chapter in their book, "Music in the Twenty-first Century" by Dr. Aitken on the future of music education in the United States. He has presented seminars and workshops at the Mid-West Band and Orchestra Clinic, the National Association of the Schools of Music, the Society for Applied Learning Technology, the National Education Association, the American Choral Directors' Association and the International Association of Jazz Educators' Association. In addition to conducting many clinics, workshops and performances in the instrumental and vocal jazz area, he presents seminars and workshops promoting multimedia and music technology.

As a wind ensemble conductor, clinician and adjudicator, Dr. Aitken is in demand worldwide. In March 2005, he was selected again to conduct the

International Association of Southeast Asia Schools (IASAS) Honor Wind Ensemble in Jakarta, Indonesia. In November 2002, he directed the All Asian Honor Wind Ensemble in Hong Kong and served a 10-day residency as the Charles W. Kell Scholar in the Hong Kong International Schools. In 2000, 2001, and 2002, he was invited to Bangkok, Thailand to serve on the international adjudication team for the Asian Symphonic Band Festival. And in 1999, he was selected as the Conductor of the IASAS Honor Wind Ensemble, which performed in March 1999 in Taipei, Taiwan.

During the 1998–99 season, Dr. Aitken was Conductor and Musical Director of the Washington Wind Symphony, one of the premiere professional wind ensembles in the United States. In addition to being the Director of the 133<sup>rd</sup> Army Band Wind Ensemble for 34 years, and Staff Bands Officer for the U.S. Sixth Army in Presidio, California, his Lane Community College wind ensembles have performed at the College Band Directors' National Association Conference, the Oregon Music Educators' Conference, the Washington Music Educators' Conference, and many others. He has studied conducting under John Paynter, Dr. Howard Hanson, James Nielson, Robert Vagner, Dr. Stanley Chapple, William D. Cole, and Dr. George Kirchner.

In the magazine, *U.S. News and World Reports*, March 10, 1997 and February 23, 1998 issues, the University of Northern Colorado's Jazz Studies Program was selected as one of the top five Jazz Studies Programs in the United States and Canada. In February 1997, Dr. Aitken was presented the State of Colorado's highest arts award, the Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts, presented for his national and international contributions to music and music education. In January 1995, Gene Aitken was the 32nd individual inducted into the International Association of Jazz Educators' Hall of Fame along with Doc Severinson and Ella Fitzgerald, joining others such as Count Basie, Woody Herman, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington. And in February 1985, he was awarded a prestigious Grammy Nomination from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. And in March 1983, the Colorado State Legislature awarded Dr. Aitken a \$50,000 Excellence in Teaching award, the only such honor presented by the Colorado Legislature.

In the area of grantsmanship, Gene Aitken has served on the Colorado Council for the Arts Review Panel in 1997–1998 and 1999–2000. He has been on several successful grant-writing teams including the multimillion-dollar award from the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, as well as being on the team receiving one of the highest-dollar grant awards from the National Endowment for the Arts. In addition, he has received several separate grants from the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Colorado Council on the Arts, the Oregon Arts Council, and the Schram Foundation.

From 2000 to 2004, Gene Aitken served as the UNC Extended Studies staff representative to Jazz at Lincoln Center, the five-day Ellington Band Directors' Academy held in Aspen, Colorado and other cities during the month of June. In June 1999 and 2000, he taught for the Teacher Training Institute in Los Angeles sponsored by the International Association of Jazz Educators. Prior to that time from 1988–1998, he was in charge of the Summer Jazz Workshop program at the Britt Educational Institute held in Medford, Oregon.

In addition to his contributions to the field of jazz education and music technology, Dr. Aitken was active in the Los Angeles area for many years writing and conducting several movie scores for full orchestra as well as serving as co-director of the Los Angeles Jazz Workshop. Also, he has studied advanced concepts in multimedia development at the American Film Institute and Film Scoring and Asian Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA).