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AND ENTERTAINMENT

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BRIAN CARLSON



KEN INGOLSSON



BRANDON COX



STEVE HENNIG

Cool tunes for **hot** nights

► Yuma Jazz Company ready for sizzling summer

BY DARIN FENGER
STAFF WRITER

Their sound may be smooth and cool but their schedule these days is nothing short of wild and hot.

The Yuma Jazz Company, after getting a couple years under their belts, have finally reached that point all groups dream of — the gigs are coming to them.

"We've had a couple weeks there playing every day," said trumpeter Steve Hennig. "As you go, you develop a following, plus places that have events know and remember you."

The Yuma Jazz Company has been whooping it up all over town lately. They played at the Yuma Art Center's opening, put on a concert series at a local state park and staged a performance with a local dance company. The group has also played at Pop-A-Top a few times and was even invited to perform for a wake in Red.



DARIN FENGER

"It's really been nice," Hennig said. "It's just great to have the opportunity to play the kind of music we play, to have a venue for it. That's just something that takes a while to develop and it's now working out."

People's responses, by the way, are music to these guys' ears.

"I do have people say that it's the greatest thing they've ever heard," he said, chuckling. "We get that every once in a while, but I'm not sure we actu-

ally believe that! But audiences are really liking it. We just get a good response."

The Yuma Jazz Company's next show is slated for 5:30 to 9 p.m. today at Pop-A-Top, 2241 S. Avenue A. Their next gig will be 7 to 9 p.m. on June 11 at

Lute's Casino. In the meantime, you hear a sample of their music by going to www.YumaSun.com/music on the Web. To contact the band, give them a holler at 345-1034.

The group's schedule isn't the only thing growing and evolving. There's also some new faces. Pianist Jimmy Griffin is the newest addition. Griffin, a local guy, made quite a name for himself playing in major hotels and nightclubs in Chicago.

"He just fits right in and he's just wonderful," Hennig said.

Drummer Brandon Cox joined last summer.

"He's been the band director at Yuma Catholic High School," Hennig said.

The rest of the lineup is Brian Carlson on various styles of saxophones and Jon Knudson on bass.

Hennig stressed that the guys' chemistry is just perfect, which is a must for a musical style that demands on-the-spot improvisation and ensemble performance.

"When you have a group of people who've been playing together for a while, then you start creating as a group. That's when it really takes off," he said. "That's the alchemy of jazz. Everything is always fresh and different."

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