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Guitar Heroes

UTB-TSC guitarists prepare for festival challenge



BY LARNA TILMAN

Bear Rodriguez, guitar teacher at the Classic School of Advanced Studies in Oklahoma City Okla., rehearses with his students Thursday for the ensemble competition portion of the UTB-TSC guitar competition in the Salon Gardania.

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Guitarists from across the country sat in corridors of the UTB-TSC Student Union strumming acoustic guitars on Thursday as they prepared to perform at the first day of the school's annual Guitar Festival.

This is the ninth year guitarists

have joined on the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College campus to face off in this low-key competition. Michael Quantz, an associate professor of music at UTB-TSC and the director of the festival, says that the competition gives young guitarists the opportunity to challenge themselves in competition and learn from their peers.

"It's so exciting when you convene people that have like ambitions and similar passions," Quantz said.

This year, the festival will benefit from a novel feature: the new Arts Center. There, UTB-TSC guitar students and visiting artists will perform in a state of the art performance hall.

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"That hall makes performances do so much more," Quantz said. "They can be quieter, because the hall amplifies the sound. The space becomes an extension of the instrument. You really play the hall."

Cassandra Andrews, a 28-year-old guitarist came to the festival from Plano as one-quarter of the Collin Guitar Quartet. Andrews said she wasn't nervous about playing on Thursday.

"I try not to think about it as a competition," Andrews said.

But her bandmate Russ Callison disagreed.

"I think you're a little more on edge because you're trying to play to the best of your ability," Callison said.

"Since it's an ensemble, it requires you to listen more intently and pay attention," added Steven Fry, also a member of the Collin Guitar Quartet.

As the group practiced their pieces for the final time before they went onstage, Sabine Madriguera, the director of Guitar Studies at Collin College, tweaked elements of their performance imperceptible to the layman.

"What Michael Quantz does is rather unusual," Madriguera said. "This is one of the few festivals where guitar ensembles can compete. We're very grateful for what he's doing."

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