



# Bluesman, students jam

## Musicians at CHS, LV learn by doing

By [Matt Phinney](#) ([Contact](#))  
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Rich DelGrosso wasn't really leading a class.

He was playing in a band.

A really big band.

DelGrosso, known as the greatest living blues mandolin player, jammed with more than 50 Lake View and Central high school music students Friday on the Central campus. It was a good warm-up for DelGrosso's Friday night concert at the Cactus Hotel.

Students were invited to perform with DelGrosso and his band that night.

"He's the real deal," said Aaron Lozano, a 17-year-old Lake View senior.

Lozano and Greg Ponder, a 17-year-old Central student, stepped out in the hall after playing a number with DelGrosso. Before long, the sound of horns, drums, bass and DelGrosso's mandolin could be heard - and felt - through the door.

"That's what he does," Ponder said, pointing to the door. "Someone plays a melody and then everyone starts jamming."

And it was quite a jam.

Students tapped their feet as they played, and more than one ventured into a solo throughout a long song.

The event came together thanks to the San Angelo Blues Society.

DelGrosso "is the epitome of blues," said Reed Shahan, a past president of the local group. "And he is such a great educator. He really has a way with students and knows how to reach them."

Before the music started, DelGrosso said he wanted to keep it loose with the students and play what they wanted to play. He talks to many classes, but most are large groups in which the students don't know much about the blues.

But Friday's group was a gathering of players, and he wanted to hear what they had.

"It's like playing to the choir," he told the group.

He talked to them about the elements of blues, melody, harmony and rhythm. Then he slung a black guitar over his shoulder and the students got ready.

"What's great about the blues," DelGrosso said, "is it's very jam friendly."

And he didn't need much structure.

"We're going to wing it a little bit," he said before the session. "These kids are players, and they already have a sense of what they need to do. I'll just see what they needed."

It sounded like they needed to jam.

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Last night Mr. DelGrosso had three of these students sit in during the event at the Cactus Music Series. Tom Blackwood on sax, Greg Ponder on trumpet, and Brianna Velasquez on bass. No rehearsal, just sit in and jam along. I'm not a music critic, but a long time blues fan. The applause was not just for the "home team", these kids were good!

A little tentative at first, they quickly got in the spirit of it and played right back at him before a packed house. Congratulations to the students and the teachers who helped get them there. It was a high point of very enjoyable evening.

Thanks you DelGrosso, it was a treat for the audience and I'm sure the youngsters will treasure the experience as long as they live.