The willingness of the performing artists of BYU, the careful choice of programs provided by the Rome District, the invaluable contributions of the Rome Mission Presidency to the realization of projects and concerts have allowed the establishment of lasting relationships with the various political, social, and religious administrations, as well as the official recognition of the local Cultural Events and Entertainment Authorities of the various Municipalities to bring about contributing performances in the summer cultural events of every city by the group “SWINGSET” BYU – Idaho, all made possible thanks to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and the Public Relations Office of the Rome District.

In this way there have been created community relationships and recognition of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

The 9th of July at about 10:00 pm I went to the Fiumicino Airport in Rome to welcome the 7 members of the jazz group lead by Mark Watkins, saxophone player, who in few days demonstrated his capability to adapt to a variety of environments, situations, circumstances and people. His good will and professionalism allowed him to select numbers perfectly suited to the moment reaching a varied audience and making each performance a success.

Character, strength, excellence and class describe the rest of the group. Mat Miles, the always affable saxophone player, Brian Pyper on trombone, Wilson Brown expert pianist, Adam Pyper, Brian’s brother and bass player, drummer David Taylor, and the solo vocalist Kristie Arnold, an audience favorite was accompanied by her husband Brent and their 14 month old boy Sam, the group’s “mascot”.

The 11th of July at 8:30 pm “Swingset” performed at Via Aurolia Antica 446, Rome: “OPERA DON GUANELLA”. Founded in 1918 where any unfortunate soul could find a word of comfort and share a bowl of soup. Today the Center with its new buildings stands as a “monument to the dignity of the individual”, over 300 people affected with psychological disabilities live there. The happiness and love of the people at the concert was palpable.

Don Mario, the Director of the Center welcomed us with great enthusiasm. He personally served dinner to the group and prayed with us. It is the first time that a group from BYU has given a musical performance at the Opera Don Guanella that together with the XVI Festa Dell’ Incontro has a calendar rich with events and concerts throughout the summer.
The 12th - 13th and 19th of July the group was at the center of three jazz concerts on Isola Tiborina, during the summer festival called “ISOLA DEL CINEMA” (Island of Movies). This international event already in its 7th year under the Sponsorship of the President of the Republic, Lazio Region, and City of Rome wants to launch Rome as a great cinema capital and attract the cities of the world. In 2001 a great collaboration with Australia was realized. Australia’s top movie stars participated and the most beautiful cinematography of the country was presented. Our Church participated in the festival for the second time with BYU musicians. We have a wonderful relationship with the organizers of the festival. There will be future collaboration for cultural and cinematic exchange between “L’ISOLA DEL CINEMA” and the various States of the Union, including Utah.

At the conclusion of each viewing the guests of the island turned to listen to a jazz concert to the joy of both modern and classic jazz lovers. The second night was a particular success.

Mr. Pagnotta, the Artistic Director of the UMBRIA JAZZ FESTIVAL, with whom we have an excellent relationship, extended an invitation to Swingset to play on two occasions during the Perugia summer festival the 15th and the 22nd of July. Both of these dates happened to fall on Sunday, so the group declined to accept the invitation for reasons of faith. Instead the group organized two firesides in Pescara and Terni that were greatly appreciated by the members and friends of our Church.

On the 18th of July, for the first time ever the BYU group played in a Jazz concert in Pescara, hosted and completely organized by the City of Pescara. The night was an unsurpassed success. The Cultural Events Officer personally thanked each performer. La Stampa gave the show the highest praise for its superb quality and the happiness of the Cultural Events Officer Licio di Biase.

The 20th of July Swingset was the guest of the City of Aquila. Bad weather precluded performing in the community stadium. But the Cultural Events Officer, Mr. Tancredi, with his colleagues at city hall organized the concert in a restaurant named for the city. The concert would become a memorable one. At the restaurant they had a combination of two Jazz groups a Trio and our Swingset. The groups and the soloists partially merged during the concert. For the Jazz lovers it was truly a feast. Outside the restaurant there were at least 50 people that couldn’t get in for lack of space. True brotherhood was born between the groups and naturally an exchange of our religious identities followed. Mission accomplished.

The day after, July 21st at 9:30 pm Swingset inaugurated the summer festival at Spoleto at the New Theatre of the Rock. The festival hosts 60 entertaining cultural events through the summer to the end of August. The Mayor of Spoleto and the Cultural Events Officer personally thanked each member of the group. Again an invitation was extended to inaugurate the festival every year with a concert or other artistic performance from BYU.
The 23rd of July the Town of Terni, the Cultural Events Officer Professor Nardini invited the group Swingset to perform a concert in the Park at Via Mola di Bernardo. It was another special evening appreciated by Jazz lovers.

“BOOKS ON THE CREST OF THE WAVE” (LIBRI SULLA CRESTA DELL’ONDA) with the Sponsorship of the Province of Latina, Lazio Region, City of Formia, Gaeta, Itri and Sperlonga, in its eighth edition is an international gathering of the protagonists of the latest literary season, events are held outdoors in the late evening at one of the most sensational places on the Ulysses Riviera.

The 24th of July Swingset performed to a full house in this setting at Sperlonga. The many select people knew how to appreciate the notes and the measures chosen expressly for this occasion by Mark Watkins creating from time to time an evocative atmosphere giving life to the pleasing conversation of the guests that evening. Our Church has begun a partnership with this organization that in the near future will bring about cultural events on the Ulysses Riviera that embrace the countries of the Mediterranean.

During these nine concerts we took the opportunity to speak about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, presenting at each occasion the missionaries at the show and asking them to stand and be recognized, inviting the public to warmly accept them as they distributed informational material about the Church and the values that we stand for like the family etc.

Italo Panone DPA Rome District
Translated by Shane Cole