Pless, Atkin perform in WMASS Ensemble
Pless moves on to All State Festival

Huntington – On Saturday, January 14, Gateway students Dawson Atkin and Anna Pless performed in the Western Massachusetts Music Educators District Festival Band, in a concert that took place at UMASS/Amherst. Like all the other ensembles at this festival, the Concert Band is by audition only, and students from all over Western Massachusetts auditioned for a select few spots. Pless and Atkin were the only two Gateway students who auditioned for the Senior District festival, and three others auditioned for the Junior District Festival later in the year.

“The experience was truly amazing,” Atkin said, “It’s such a unique experience to work with a group of other musicians with so much talent. You show up, having practiced these incredibly difficult pieces, and hoping everyone else has done the same. And then, you arrive, and everything clicks into place, and you can dive deeper into the music in a way that you just can’t get to in a band class.”

Both Pless and Atkin were selected on their instruments: Alto and Baritone Saxophone, respectively. Not only were both students selected, they both earned the highest scores on their instruments, meaning that they were recommended to audition for the All-State ensemble, an even more selective ensemble that you must earn an audition for. Both students auditioned with Pless, a senior, earning a highly coveted spot in the All-State ensemble. The All-State music festival will take place from March 9 – 11 in Boston.

“Afterwards, I felt horrible about my audition. I hadn’t done as well as I had wished to,” reported Pless. “On Monday, however, I found out that I actually got in!”

“I really can’t express how grateful I am to my family, friends and especially (Gateway band director) Mrs. Guertin for all they’ve done to get me to where I am now.”

At the Western Mass concert, the band performed three pieces: Athletic Festival March by Serge Prokofiev, Sheltering Sky by John Mackey, and Lincolnshire Posy by Percy Aldridge Grainger (Movements I, II, V, and VI). The students were expected to prepare their individual parts before meeting with the ensemble for the first time, which happened only a week before the concert. After a combined 12 hours of rehearsal over two days, the band took to the stage to perform.

The festival consisted of three additional ensembles, including the Jazz Band, Chorus, and Orchestra. Each ensemble performed with talent and close attention to detail, that, at times, led the observer to forget they were listening to a group of teenagers rather than trained, professional musicians. All the students were well-prepared, providing for an amazing performance that is to be remembered.

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Photo: Dawson Atkin and Anna Pless, students at Gateway Regional High School, performed recently with the WMMEA District Concert Band.