

Trombones – 100 of them – to show fun, serious sides

By **Jerry Fink (contact)**

Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2009 | 2 a.m.

The 25th edition of UNLV's "76 Trombones + 4" might be dubbed the "funny bones" concert.

"I think they marked the concert down from 78 trombones," said comedian Nelson Sardelli, who will host the Sunday afternoon show at Artemus Ham Hall.

One of the 100 or so trombonists who will perform is Irv Wagner, a professor at the University of Oklahoma. On "Bye, Bye Blues" Wagner uses the toes of his right foot to manipulate the slide while he uses his hands to accompany himself with spoons.

"He's one of the most entertaining guys you'd ever want to meet," says Ken Hanlon, former head of the UNLV music department and organizer of the concert. "Professor Wagner has been more instrumental in doing good things for the trombone around the world than anybody I can think of."

Lest trombone purists think their instrument is being belittled by nonserious performances, guest soloists include Bill Booth, a UCLA professor who will perform a classical number, and Elliot Mason, an Englishman in New York who plays with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.

Renowned trombonist Harry Betts — now retired after years in the studio performing with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Mel Torme and Frank Sinatra — will fly in from Los Angeles to conduct an arrangement he has written for the concert.

The "76 Trombones + 4" concert has attracted some of the top trombonists in the world since it was started by Vegas trombonist Ralph Pressler in 1984 as a memorial for the late Abe Nole.

"We've never had fewer than 72 trombonists, and usually we have around 80," Hanlon says. One year there were 129 trombones. Though trombones dominate the concert, they are accompanied by a rhythm section of piano, bass and drums.