



MIKE BROWN/THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Professional jazz trumpeter Ingrid Jensen (center), who has performed with Grammy-winning jazz ensembles, reacts as Overton High School sophomore Darian Matthews (left), 15, answers back with a trumpet solo of his own while the pair trade licks during a workshop at the school. The Thelonious Monk Institute brought six students from the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts to work with the school's jazz ensemble.

Getting warmer

■ L.A. jazz students join with Overton counterparts to heat up workshop

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A sextet of students studying a brassy but polished form of jazz in the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts absorbed a bluesy, backwater feel rising from horn, keyboard and drums at Overton High School.

"Have you met Luca?" asked Dr. J.B. Dyas, vice president of education at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, clearing a spot for Luca Ferrera, 17, in the midst of Overton's award-winning Blue Jazz Ensemble. "Show each other some stuff. That's the idea of this whole thing."

For the next 60-plus minutes Tuesday, West Coast and Mid-South met in a peer-to-peer harmonic convergence — directed by Grammy-winning trumpeter Ingrid Jensen — a nod to the kind of learning Charlie Parker and Monk themselves prized.

"Cool. That felt a lot better, right?" said Jensen, her burnished gold trumpet dangling like a charm as she praised the melody and rhythm sections.

"It's starting to get a lot warmer, and you are listening. You know the deal. Listen. If you hear only yourself, and you are too loud, then back off. Listen for who is

in charge of the melody line."

With funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and a local assist from the Dockery Farms Foundation, the Thelonious Monk Institute is touring the cradle of the blues this week, starting at Dockery Farms in Cleveland, Miss., where Morgan Freeman was a surprise concert guest Sunday. Then they followed the river north to Overton, the only high school for the creative and performing arts in the region.

NEA and the Thelonious Monk Institute choose three cities a year for the peer review, preferring cities that offer lessons of their own for aspiring musicians.

"These kids at Overton play amazingly well," Dyas said. "The L.A. kids are seeing that they have the feeling of the Memphis blues in their playing."

"The L.A. kids have more modern jazz polish in their playing. What each one needs is what the other has. I was just getting shivers listening to what our kids are getting from what the Memphis kids had to offer, and the Memphis kids getting what the L.A. kids had to offer. It's the same way Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk and Dizzie Gillespie did 60 years ago in the bebop era," he said.

Part of the lesson is that jazz encom-

passes the American qualities of teamwork, ethnic diversity and democracy, Dyas said. "You all have individual freedom, but you're responsible to the group. The same is true in jazz."

Across the ensemble, buttressed for the afternoon with two first-chair saxophonists, two guitar players, keyboardists and first trumpets, kids watched the fingering and breathing of the newcomers next to them. They asked about practice times and where they find inspiration.

"Listening will help you guys swing together," said Aaron Shaw, an L.A. saxophone player wedged in among the Overton sax players. "Listen to Charlie Parker and those cats. They were all swinging and coming from their heart they way they did back then."

Then another voice dropped in the value of YouTube as an easy way to hear several artists' take on the same song. "There's so much to be absorbed from all that," Jensen said. "And you can learn it so much faster than reading it on a page."

The California sextet is in Oxford, Miss., on Wednesday, then back in Memphis on Thursday and Friday, performing with students at Douglass High School and Soulsville charter school.

With support from Tommie Pardue, onetime head of the Memphis City Schools music program, the sextet will perform free concerts at 6 and 8 p.m. Thursday at B.B. King's Blues Club at 143 Beale.