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Trumpeter Darren Barrett, a student at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, gives Shaw Junior High School students a demonstration. PHOTOS BY ARIS ECONOMOPOULOS FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

## At D.C. School, a Sweet Refrain

### Famous Jazz Lovers Talk About the Merits of Music

By Hamil R. Harris  
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In a city where many teenagers are familiar with the crackle of gunfire, the chorus of sirens and other sounds of violence, District youths were elated yesterday to hear the sweet strains of jazz—and meet a few celebrities who dropped in to encourage their appreciation of music.

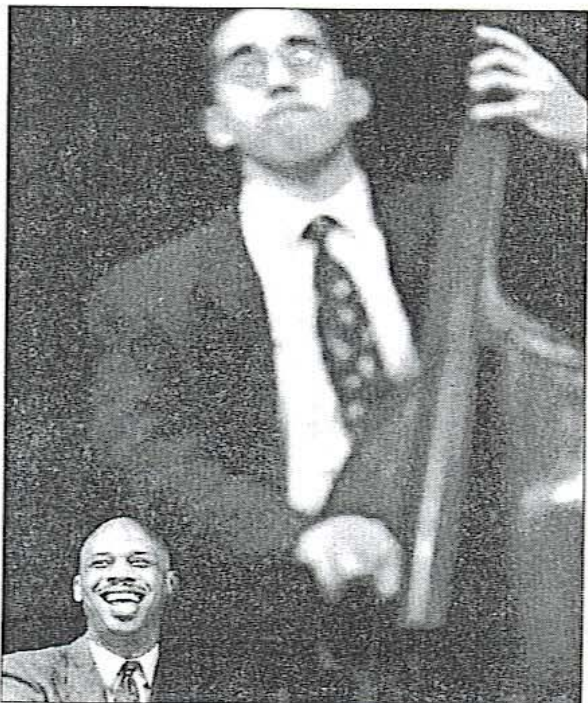
Former Los Angeles Laker Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, actor Billy Dee Williams and several top jazz artists went to Shaw Junior High in Northwest Washington for a school assembly aimed at steering young people into jazz and other music programs.

"I began my life listening to jazz," Abdul-Jabbar told the students, who included youth from throughout the city. "My dad was a jazz musician. I got here listening to my father while I was in the womb."

Abdul-Jabbar is national chairman of Jazz Sports, an innovative jazz music instruction program he helped start last year in South Central Los Angeles. Now the program, a public-private venture involving the National Basketball Association, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Fannie Mae Foundation, Nissan Motor Co., Washington Gas Light Co. and Black Entertainment Television, is expanding to the District in the hopes of drawing talent out of at-risk youngsters.

The idea is to bring local and national "jazz masters" into contact with students who don't usually have access to professional instrument training. They will meet for biweekly lessons; later, they will perform at center court at Washington Bullets games during pregame and halftime breaks. Program organizers would like to start

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Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, left, laughs as bass player Keala Kaumeheiwā, an institute student, gives a jazz rendition of "The Flintstones" theme.

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# Jazz Lovers Talk to Students About the Merits of Music Instruction

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JAZZ From B1

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other programs in the Washington area and several other NBA cities.

"Jazz is America's classical art form," Abdul-Jabbar said in an interview. "It is so related to the African American experience that any inner-city kid will be able to relate if they are pointed in the right direction."

The school visit by celebrities coincided with the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, a star-packed gala held last night at the Kennedy Center to honor the legendary pianist and composer who died in 1982.

"This is really about keeping the fire going in kids when they are in situations where the fire can be snuffed out," said Thelonious Monk Jr., the jazz great's son.

Washington Bullets General Manager Wes Unseld said the goal of the program goes beyond giving young people a showcase during an NBA game. "It is about commitment," he said. "One has to be committed to something if they are going to be good at it."

Williams said there is a renaissance today with black teenagers. What is needed, the actor said, "are

people who are experienced to set them on the right course."

At Shaw yesterday, jazz saxophonist Bobby Watson told the students, "This instrument has taken me around the world." He and a band of international artists entertained the assembly with a variety of music, everything from Duke Ellington's "It Don't Mean a Thing" to variations on themes of cartoons such as "The Flintstones."

"I never really listened to it, but it sounds real good," said Aaron Doughty, 16, a drummer from Douglass Junior High in Southeast Washington who tapped his toes and smiled.

Doughty, a resident of the Barry Farms public housing complex, where he said there is shooting all the time, said he hopes that football or playing the drums will be his ticket to a better life.

Charles Edwards, 16, who lives in the Anacostia section of Southeast Washington and attends the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, got the chance to play his saxophone on stage with Watson.

Edwards said mastering the instrument doesn't leave him time to get in trouble: "I am always practicing."