

Caught: Louie Bellson Plays Ellington

# DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond

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Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Performance graduate Helen Sung receives the Directors Award from Artistic Director Ron Carter (left) and Program Director Carl Atkins.

## First Monk Institute Class Graduates With The Goods

The first class of seven promising jazz talents graduated May 18 from the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Performance, an ambitious two-year developmental program based at the New England Conservatory in Boston.

The participants studied tuition-free with living jazz masters in a program designed to advance their skills as players and future band leaders. The seven, ranging in age from 24 to 31, are trumpeter Darren Barrett from England, saxophonist Ignaz Dinne from Germany, guitarist Ofer Ganor from Israel, percussionist Sean Thomas from Trinidad and three Americans: bassist Keala Kaumeheiwa, pianist Helen Sung and trombonist/percussionist Akili Jamal Haynes.

They came to the program with varying levels of higher education, two with no college at all, three with master's degree experience. Their professional jazz experience ranged from none to several years' work with renowned bandleaders.

The students studied full-time at the conservatory. With funding from Nissan Motor Corp. USA, 30 master musicians visited for one-week residencies, including Clark Terry, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Jimmy Heath, Wynton Marsalis, Wayne Shorter, Grover Washington Jr., Slide Hampton, Barry Harris, Jackie McLean, Al Grey, Curtis Fuller, Roland Hanna and Bobby Watson. Formal studies included work on practice routines, sight reading, ensemble playing, improvisation, composition, arranging and the tradition of jazz. The stu-

dents were also exposed to the ins and outs of the business side of music, including publishing rights, contracts and career promotion. They participated in community outreach in public schools in Boston and other cities. They toured India and Thailand last year for three weeks with Hancock and Wayne Shorter.

Carter was so impressed after his one-week visit in the spring of 1996 that he signed on this past academic year as artistic director of the program. He spent six days a month in Boston working with the students. "There is nothing like this program anywhere," Carter said. "These students understand that this is a serious music. Clearly, they have the goods to carry on this music. They now know you have to give your all every time out. When you take the instrument out, you have to play like it is your last time, your last chance to get it right."

Drummer T.S. Monk, chairman of the Monk Institute, calls the program "a dream come true. The proof is in the playing. If you listen to these kids now, it is clear that this is the right direction."

Monk said the program has also been beneficial for the participating master musicians. "When you are on the road, you don't have a lot of time to refresh your music and go over your basic skills," he noted. "This has been a great environment for the musicians to decide what they want to teach, to pass on to the next generations."

—Ken Franckling