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NEWS

Hartford among handful of school districts to try eJazz curriculum

By Kathleen O'Neil

Hartford has been chosen. On April 26, Hartford's public high schools officially became one of five school systems nationwide to participate in a new Internet-based jazz curriculum as part of American History classes.

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, named for one of the most influential figures in Jazz history, recently launched "Jazz in America," a program

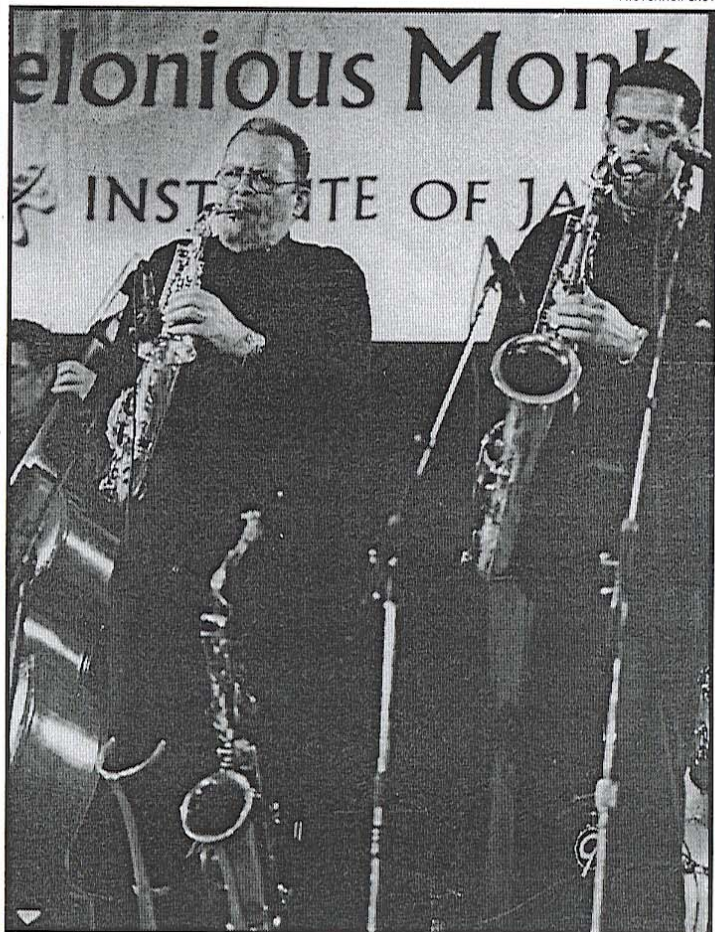
which will eventually be made available to all fifth, eighth and eleventh graders in public schools in the U.S., but for now is being piloted at the 11th grade level. It is the first jazz studies/history curriculum on the Web being implemented nationwide by a non-profit organization.

Thelonious Monk Jr., chair of the Institute, was at the Weaver High performance to kick-off the program in Hartford.

The pilot program for 11th grade students was launched in Miami in February by Tipper Gore, the program's honorary chair. In addition to Miami and Hartford, Cleveland, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles have been chosen for the pilot program. From here, the curriculum will be implemented in phases starting with 11th, then 8th and finally 5th grade students. Each level will be piloted before becoming national.

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World-renowned jazz saxophonist Jackie McLean, left, and his son Rene performed recently at a Weaver High School assembly to launch the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz's new "Jazz in America" program in Hartford's high schools. Hartford is one of five school systems nationwide chosen for the pilot program.



eJazz curriculum

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Once all three grades are implemented, by February 2003, the curriculum will have the potential to reach as many as 12 million students annually.

Hartford Public School's Director of Communications Matt Losak says Hartford is a natural choice for the program, "Hartford has lots of quality musicians, so it's natural the city be recognized as a music and cultural center." Also, Superintendent Anthony Amato has focused on reforming the music and arts program in Hartford's schools and thinks recent national recognition helped to get Hartford on the short list.

The Institute's Educational Director J.B. Dyas says Hartford was chosen to participate for several reasons. "We wanted the pilot program to be coast-to-coast in diverse cities. Also, Hartford will show us how the program does in a smaller city."

Connections also helped. Hartford was chosen as a "GE city" by the GE Fund, who, along with the AT&T Foundation, made a lead gift to support the initial development of the project. Chris King, program manager for GE Fund, cited the city's proximity to GE Industrial Systems global headquarters in Plainville. In addition, Jackie McLean, co-director of the Artists Collective in Hartford, is a consultant for the project.

The project's writing team devel-

oped eight 50-minute lessons to be taught twice a week over the course of a month as part of each school's regular social studies or American history class. Although it is designed to coincide with Black History Month, Dyas says it doesn't have to. "Jazz has reflected, anticipated and contributed

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— Matt Losak,

*Hartford Public School’s
Director of Communications*

to American culture; therefore, it can be used in conjunction with lessons on different periods in American history," he added.

Dyas feels jazz music also can be used to teach Democracy. "Jazz is about an individual's freedom, through improvisation, within the context of responsibility to the group as a whole."

The project's Web site, www.jazzinamerica.org has lesson plans, teachers' manuals and assessments, a test bank and music samples. Teachers can choose to teach the curriculum

with or without computers. In addition, Tom Carter, president of the Institute, encourages cities to use resident musicians for live concerts in schools to supplement the curriculum.

"It's a win, win, win situation for the teachers, students and community," Dyas pointed out.

Paul Stringer, principal of Weaver High School, says, "We are honored as a school and as a city to be included in this program."

According to Stringer, teachers trained on the curriculum are already utilizing the program. "The teachers have been open to the curriculum and have been impressed so far."

As for the students, Stringer says

they are happy to be one of the chosen few, "The students experienced something [the concert] they won't be able to see again; they are quite glad."

And Dyas says piloting is really working, "We're getting lots of suggestions already, such as adding new topics or cutting down existing ones."

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz is a non-profit organization. Funding comes from numerous public and private sources. Companies and individuals interested in contributing to the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz may contact the Institute by phone at (202) 364-7272, by mail at 5225 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Suite 605, Washington, D.C. 20015, or on the Internet at www.monkinstitute.com. ■