

Jazzin' it up

*Two music greats visit
Missoula high schools*

By JANE RIDER
of the Missoulian

She's only a century old, a child in the world of music, born out of the black experience in America, evolving from slave work songs, spirituals, blues, brass bands and ragtime.

She comes to life as a musical conversation, partly planned and partly spontaneous, dialogue between musicians.

She is jazz – widely considered the truly original American art form.

Yet most Americans graduate from high school with little knowledge of the history or importance of jazz.

On Monday, a three-piece jazz combo, joined by one of the world's top alto saxophonists, Bobby Watson, and renowned jazz vocalist Vanessa Rubin, tried to change that. They gave two performances that mixed music with education at Hellgate and Big Sky high schools.

They'll return for an encore at Sentinel High School on Tuesday.

The jazz tour is one way in which the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, a nonprofit educational organization, is introducing its Jazz in America National Jazz Curriculum to thousands of public school students across Montana this month.

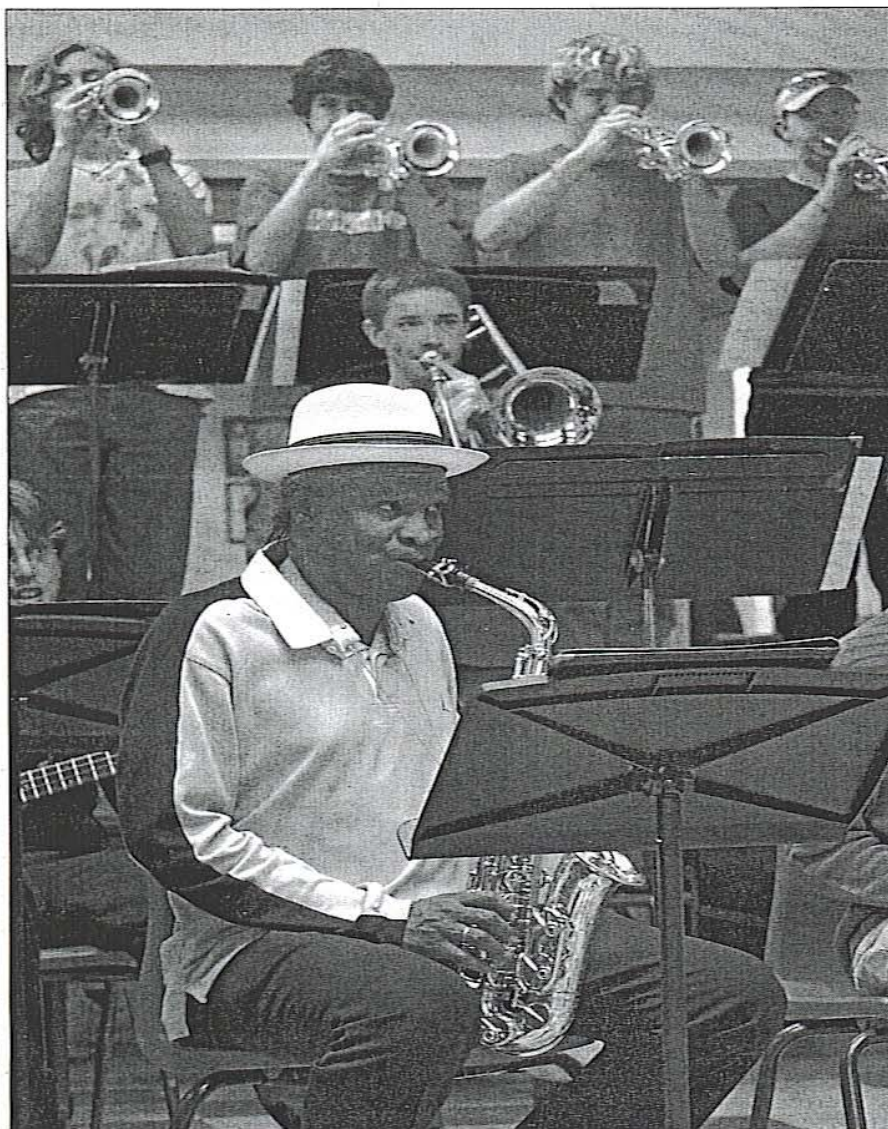
The institute's new Internet-based jazz curriculum for fifth-, eighth and 11th-grade social studies, American history and music students can be found at www.jazzinamerica.org.

It is the first jazz curriculum to use state-of-the-art Internet technology offered free of charge to all public schools on a national basis. It also represents the most significant and potentially wide-reaching jazz/social studies education program ever undertaken by an arts organization.

"Giving students a sense of this original American art form is what this initiative is all about," said J.B. Dyas, project director for the institute's Jazz In America program.

A grant from the Allen Foundation for Music is enabling the institute to present the series of school assembly programs in Montana and Idaho public schools in 2003. Last year, the foundation sponsored a similar tour at 20 public schools in Portland, Ore., and Seattle.

The study of jazz helps students develop a better understanding of and respect for this country's diverse cultural heritage, Dyas said. Perhaps there is no better example of democracy than a jazz ensemble – individual freedom but with responsibility to the group, he said.



TOM BAUER/Missoulian

Jazz legend Bobby Watson sits in with band students at Hellgate High School on Monday after an earlier performance for the school. Watson, joined by a three-piece band and vocalist Vanessa Rubin, are touring schools to entertain, to educate students in jazz and to introduce a new jazz curriculum for public school students.

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An audience of several hundred Hellgate students packed the newly remodeled auditorium to become quickly captivated by the sounds of Joshua Ginsburg on bass, Rob Perkins on drums, Danny Grissett on piano and Watson with his smooth saxophone.

Watson has headlined at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and major jazz festivals in the United States and abroad. He's appeared on more than 50 recordings, graced the cover of national music magazines and was named top alto saxophone player and musician of the year in Downbeat Magazine's critics' poll.

Toes tapped, hands clapped and voices hooted and hollered at the end of each musician's improvisation. Perkins and Grissett are 2001 graduates of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz

Performance at the University of Southern California. The specialized graduate-level college program enables the world's most gifted young musicians to study tuition-free with the greatest living jazz legends including Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and Clark Terry.

Ginsburg attended the Thelonious Monk Institute Jazz Colony in Aspen, Colo.

Between songs, Dyas gave Hellgate students a lesson in how musicians know when it's their turn to improvise and how beats, chords, measures and choruses mix to make jazz music.

Rubin took the stage midway through the hourlong presentation with her rich, soulful voice. "Music expresses so much about human emotions that can't be put into words,"

About the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz

The institute was established in 1986 with a mission to preserve America's legacy of jazz through performance and education. It offers the world's most promising young musicians college-level training by America's jazz masters and presents public school-based jazz education programs for young people around the world.

As part of its tour, the institute is offering jazz band clinics and teacher training workshops to staff and high school jazz bands. The workshops are designed to

familiarize American history and social studies teachers with the Jazz In America Web site, in hopes that they will incorporate the materials into their regular classroom teaching. The workshops take place in school computer labs, giving teachers the opportunity to navigate the curriculum Web site and ask questions about the lesson plans and supplemental materials.

All of the lesson plans follow national and state learning standards in American History and Arts Education.

"Most of the guys in my high school band - we're still friends today," he said. "There is something about being in a band that bonds you for life. It's very cool."

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she said.

She also gave a nod to Hellgate's new performance venue, saying "this is such a warm and intimate auditorium - perfect for jazz performances."

The Cleveland native has sung more than once at the

White House and at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and the Kennedy Center.

When the hour was up, students responded with a standing ovation.

'The music - what's on the page - is just a skeleton. You need to memorize it so you can put more of your own expression into it.'

- Bobby Watson, alto saxophonist

"This totally made my day - it made my month," said Jennifer Schuberg, 15, a Hellgate freshman who plays piano and clarinet.

"It was completely amazing," said Annie Everingham, 15, a Hellgate freshman and cello player.

Hellgate juniors Sara Newman and Angel Hertslet, both alto saxophonists in the high school band, appreciated the opportunity to hear such high-caliber performers in Missoula.

"It was a good experience for Hellgate to have this," said Newman, 17. "They were so much fun to watch. It makes you want to explore."

"You can't help but smile because they are having so much fun up there," said Hertslet, 16. "It was incredible. I can't stop smiling."

The day wasn't quite over for students in Hellgate's Jazz Band. For another hour, Watson, Grissett, Perkins and Dyas offered their expertise as the teens practiced songs in the band room.

Grissett took a seat next to Hellgate pianist Ben Schuberg on the piano bench, Perkins mingled with Hellgate drummers Amanda Combs and Sam McKenzie, while Watson pulled up a chair beside the band's saxophonists and below its brass section.

They critiqued the band's performances, suggested ways to improve the sound and shared words of encouragement.

"The music - what's on the page - is just a skeleton," Watson said. "You need to memorize it so you can put more of your own expression into it."

"Each tune has its own little strut," Perkins said. "You guys have to decide how you want to do it ... how you want to walk down the hall."

Watson encouraged the teens to listen to great jazz musicians and to enjoy their time together as a band.

"You got nice feeling, flavor, spirit," Watson said. "That comes through in the music."