

# Chicago Tribune

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## JAZZ REVIEW

# To kids raised on rap, Hancock explores link to jazz

By Howard Reich  
Tribune arts critic

Herbie Hancock opened obliquely, with a few splashy chords and a couple of rumbling bass notes.

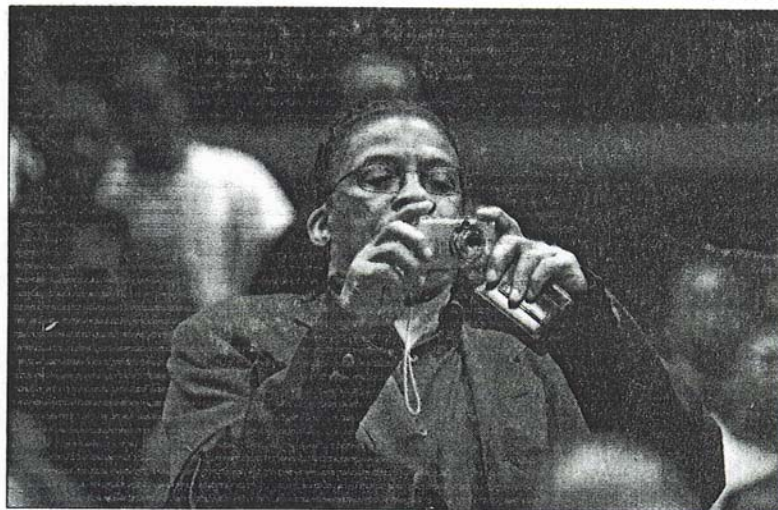
But once he dug into the gently swaying groove that drives his classic "Cantaloupe Island," the kids literally started screaming.

Instantly, they raised their hands, rocked in their seats, shouted out their approval and otherwise carried on as if they were relishing the latest hip-hop hit — rather than a jazz tune penned eons ago, in the 1960s.

Many said they didn't know Hancock's music. Most probably hadn't encountered him live, in performance.

Yet something about that song — its hypnotic beat, its lilting melody, its distinctly African-American sensibility — reached an audience of hundreds of students during an assembly Monday morning at Corliss High School, on East 103rd Street.

And that was precisely the point: to show a young audience more typically tuned to rap, hip-hop and other urban musical forms that jazz stands at the root of it all, a fount of popular music in America.



Tribune photo by Bill Hogan

Herbie Hancock photographs a Corliss High School math teacher as she receives an award on Monday.

"It was encouraging to me that in spite of the huge difference in our ages, there's a common ground where we can meet; there's a common language that's available to us.

"And that language is jazz."

Hancock has devoted his life and career to that proposition, but in the past couple

"I was so happy with how those kids reacted," Hancock, 65, said after the performance, a "Jazz in America" session organized by the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz to introduce young audiences to the music.

of years, as chairman of the not-for-profit Monk Institute, he has championed the music where it's needed most: in the schools.

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Tribune photos by Bill Hogan

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## HANCOCK: Exposing youths to the language of jazz music

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The very presence of the world-famous musician, who was born and raised in Chicago, typically attracts standing-room-only crowds and TV news crews, as it did on this occasion.

But Hancock wasn't alone.

The all-star lineup included U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.), who spoke passionately about Chicago's stature as a jazz nexus; alto saxophonist Bobby Watson, whose searing solo version of "Amazing Grace" drew a standing ovation; and Thelonious Monk Jr., chairman of the institute's board of trustees, who riffed eloquently on American jazz icons.

"Duke Ellington and John Coltrane and W.C. Handy are connected," said Monk.

"They're connected to Beyonce; they're connected to Usher," he added, reiterating the link between the past and present of American music.

Though conventional wisdom suggests youngsters today are about as interested in music by Coltrane and Ellington as they are in scores by Beethoven and Bach, this session argued strongly to the contrary.

"I thought it was a very cultured show, really impressive," said Cordell White, a senior at Corliss.

"I never heard Herbie Hancock before," said Latonisha Mitchell, a freshman. "He plays great."

The Monk Institute has been presenting events such as this since 2000, when it launched a Web-based National Jazz Curriculum designed for 5th, 8th and 11th graders. The nifty site, at [www.jazzinamerica.org](http://www.jazzinamerica.org), includes a teacher's manual, student handouts and nitty-gritty information on the musicians, repertoire and evolution of jazz.

What makes it different from many such efforts is that its lineup of eight, 50-minute lesson plans is designed to be taught to American history or social studies classes, rather than to music classes.



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The strategy, said Monk Institute President Thomas Carter, is to reach as wide a student base as possible.

The program at Corliss, which will be repeated (sans Hancock) at other Chicago schools this week, was fashioned — in part — to trumpet the Internet site.

"The idea is that if a school uses our curriculum, the student will be exposed to jazz at least three different times by the time he graduates high school," said Carter, who estimates that about 1 million American students have checked into the program to date.

But it's live events, such as Monday's show, that typically spur interest.

Corliss senior Michelle Wilson certainly was impressed.

"I liked what I heard," she said. "I'd listen to a jazz show again, anytime."

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