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Jazz legend strikes chord with students

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**SAX GIANT HOSTS
LAFAYETTE CLINIC**

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Before Bobby Watson became an internationally known saxophonist, he was a high school student with an eye on a dream.

And when he was in high school — years ago in Minneapolis, Minn. — he met jazz great Clark Terry.

"He was one of my inspirations for wanting to work with young people," said the Grammy-nominated Watson.

Yesterday Watson visited Lafayette High School jazz band students with the "Jazz in America Tour" and spent one hour working with saxophone, trombone, trumpet and other jazz band players in an interactive music clinic. But before all that, the jazz great thanked students.

"For you to come here to be a part of this is very special," he said.

The program is part of the Washington-based Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz and travels the country bringing jazz education to 5th, 8th and 11th grade public school students. Lafayette was selected because of its renowned jazz program.

Along with Watson, other members of the tour include pianist Danny Grissett, bassist Derek Nievergelt and drummer Otis Brown III. The three accompanied the jazz band while Watson also played a few times.

Tempering his tough approach with humor and a wide grin, Watson dissected Frank

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Jazz saxophonist Bobby Watson, left, riffed with students in the Lafayette High School jazz band yesterday during an hour-long clinic. Watson, a Grammy-nominated artist, is part of the "Jazz in America" program that travels the nation, teaching young musicians about the lessons of jazz music.

PHOTOS BY
DAVID PERRY |
STAFF

JAZZ | Students say session inspired them with confidence

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Foster's *Who Me?* measure by measure, note by note. First he listened to the band's rendition of the song, hands clasped behind his back and his foot tapping rhythmically to the music.

"All right, very good, very good," he said. "Sometimes your eighth notes are a little too choppy."

Watson then selected the trumpet section to play a few measures. After a few attempts, Watson stopped them.

"Let me go old school on you," he said, as he pointed to 16-year-old sophomore Robbie Elliot.

Then it was 16-year-old sophomore Donald Lafleur's turn.

"Oh, you're the culprit," Watson said, as the room erupted in laughter. The students were nervous at first, but an hour later, the band transformed. They played louder, they played harder and they were



Instructing the class on the finer points of jazz, Bobby Watson used his wide grin and humorous approach to coax students into playing with more assurance. "He just made (playing jazz) a lot more fun," said Jennifer Bitzer, 15.

more emphatic.

The result fascinated both the band director and students working with the jazz legend.

"It was just really inspirational," said freshman Jennifer Bitzer, 15. "He just made (playing jazz) a lot more fun. I learned a lot, I can just

play out and be confident."

Senior Andrew McGrannahan, 17, plans to study music performance at the University of Kentucky.

"I think we were just shell-shocked at first to be in front of someone so great," he said. "He's

doing what we want to do ... he's living the dream we all want."

Watson said it's "a rush, it's a great feeling" to work with students.

"In certain parts of the country they're not going to come in contact with jazz musicians," he said.

Jazz Band director John Richardson said he could definitely feel a difference in the students' performance.

"Coming from someone who is a historical figure, he has a lot more influence than your every day Joe Schmo," Richardson said. "He's been one of my role models since I was 15 years old."

Watson and the rest of the touring musicians ended their day by playing for 600 students in the high school auditorium.

The tour continues today in Frankfort at Franklin County High School and Elkhorn Middle School. Then it moves to Louisville where it will play at Meyzeek Middle School and the Youth Performing Arts School on Wednesday, Ather-ton High School on Thursday and Central High School on Friday.

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