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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Monk Institute program magnificent

To the editor:

Even in the midst of winter, it's a joy to live in South Mississippi. Not only do we enjoy prosperity and good fortune, but our children are exposed to the arts and magnificent talent, thanks to the generous support of corporate neighbors and dedicated individuals. So it was Feb. 10, when the Northrop Grumman Corporation sponsored the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz presentation of Jazz in America.

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz is a non-profit organization established in memory of the legendary jazz pianist and composer. The mission of this wonderful institution is to promote the only truly original American art form through its public-school based jazz education programs.

As hundreds of Pascagoula High School students gathered with eyes wide in anticipation, J.B. Dyas, project director for Jazz in America, gave a lesson in Democracy through music. He said "Jazz is Democracy: Each musician is free to do as he wants with responsibility to the group." What a great lesson to teach our kids. As in jazz we can all enjoy liberty, so long as we are responsible to each other. And these great musicians poured out their souls to the delight of the impressionable assemblage.

Led by the extraordinary Bobby Watson on alto sax, the rhythm section of keyboard, drums and stand-up bass thrilled the youthful audience as they taught the basics of improvisation. The enthusiasm of the morning reached a fever pitch when Lisa Henry sang of her home town in the venerable Kansas City. To their credit, our young citizens and future impresarios were respectful and attentive as an expression of their admiration. The beautiful performance was only tarnished by the acoustic challenges of the gymnasium, starkly identifying one of our community's ongoing needs.

As the father of two aspiring musicians, I am grateful to the Northrop Grumman Corporation, the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz and the principal and educators of Pascagoula High School for this remarkable event. We have much to be grateful for in this area, and indeed this nation. With programs like this we can look confidently toward our children's future.

Laurin F. Avara
Pascagoula