

# THE MISSISSIPPI PRESS

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2005

## THELONIOUS MONK INSTITUTE



# JAZZ

## MESSENGERS

*Thelonious Monk Institute artists wow Gautier Middle School students*



By **DONNA HARRIS**  
The Mississippi Press

**GAUTIER** — Like serving broccoli to a teenager who may develop a liking for it, Thelonious Monk Jr. offered a taste of jazz to several hundred students.

Monk, the son of legendary jazz musician Thelonious Monk and an acclaimed jazz drummer on his own, spoke to students at Gautier Middle School Thursday to introduce them to what he calls "America's greatest musical contribution to the world."

He spoke to more than 1,000 students at Pascagoula High School earlier in the day and hosted a master class for the high school jazz band.

The tour is part of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz's "Jazz in America: The National Jazz Curriculum." With grants from Northrop Grumman and the National Endowment for the Arts, Monk travels with a five-piece jazz combo featuring Bobby Watson, Richard Johnson, Derek Nievergelt, Otis Brown III and Lisa Henry and Jazz in America project director J.B. Dyas.

Through assemblies and master classes, the ensemble hopes to create admirers of jazz, Henry said.

Sixth-grader Marie Floore bobbed her head to the beat of the bass. "It's good music," she said. "It sounds terrific. It sounds awesome and all that."

After the combo played a few songs for the enthusiastic crowd of students and teachers, Dyas gave a quick theory lesson in the composition of jazz.



Photos by William Colgin/The Mississippi Press

Lisa Henry, top left, adds her vocal stylings to a variety of jazz selections for Gautier Middle School students Thursday afternoon. The musicians with the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz are touring Mississippi presenting 'Jazz In America' to introduce youngsters to the distinctly American genre. Thelonious Monk Jr., top right, is chairman of the board for the institute. Above, from left, Lisa Henry, Derek Nievergelt and Bobby Watson also perform a selection of jazz and blues at Gautier Middle School.

He said jazz is a democracy because it gives "individual freedom but with responsibility to the group."

He added later, "That's exactly how the country should be run."

Leah Rollins of Pascagoula, a private piano and vocal instructor, attended the presentation in both Pascagoula and Gautier.

"It was so good, I wanted to see them a second time," she said. "This was an awe-

some opportunity. I just wish everybody in the district had a chance to see this."

Saxophonist Bobby Watson, who led the combo, told the students that jazz will stay with them as they mature. "The older you get, when you get into jazz, you're going to be hip," he said.

He told them that many of them had already been listening to jazz without knowing it, and proved it by play-

ing the theme from the animated series, *The Flintstones*.

"Jazz has a way of sneaking into your life without you even knowing it," he said.

Reporter Donna Harris can be reached at [dharris@themississippipress.com](mailto:dharris@themississippipress.com) or (228) 934-1448.