

# DOWNBEAT

## Jazz On Campus

### Monk Institute Launches Peer-to-Peer Education Program

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz has forged a new framework for building participation in jazz education. In collaboration with the Dakota Foundation for Jazz Education and the Children's Music and Arts Foundation, the Monk Institute introduced "Peer-to-Peer" jazz education programs in five Minneapolis/St. Paul public schools from March 6–10.

Saxophonist Bobby Watson and vocalist Lisa Henry helped launch the new program, a component of the Monk Institute's Jazz in America outreach initiative, which includes the National Jazz Curriculum ([jazzinamerica.org](http://jazzinamerica.org)). Watson and Henry presented educational "informances" at five Twin Cities public schools with six talented jazz students from the tuition-free Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. The students selected for the tour were pianist Kris Bowers (16), trumpeter Gregory Diaz (17), bassist Garret Lang (16), guitarist Michael McTaggart (17), saxophonist Daniel Richardson (17) and drummer Max Wrightson (17).

Each "informance" included a concert for the students followed by a jazz workshop for each school's jazz band with the L.A. students playing alongside their Twin Cities counterparts. After a week of jazz concerts and workshops at each school, a two-night stint at the Dakota Jazz Club followed. "Their level of devotion and dedication to the music was outstanding," said Watson, director of jazz studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. "If I had the money, I would record them. I'm going to send the trumpet player some of my music. If I ever get the chance to use him in [my band] Horizon, I will. The piano player, too."

The six L.A. students talked with their Twin Cities peers about what jazz is, why it's important to America and how a jazz ensemble represents a perfect democracy. They also discussed some of the intangibles jazz represents: teamwork, unity with ethnic diversity, goal accomplishment and finding a passion.

"As young people are so influenced by kids their own age, who better

Michael McTaggart (left), Lisa Henry, Gregory Diaz, Kris Bowers, Daniel Richardson, Max Wrightson, Bobby Watson and Garret Lang



to expose them to this great American art form than those of their own generation?" said Thelonious Monk Jr., Monk Institute chairman. "With Bobby Watson and Lisa Henry in the mix, it's an opportunity for everyone concerned: students, teachers, musicians and non-musicians."

The participating students seemed to agree with Monk's philosophy. "Having the opportunity to share our music with kids our own age halfway across the country—and play with Bobby Watson, no less—I'm sure everyone will learn a lot from everybody," said Diaz, a member of the 2006 Gibson/Baldwin Grammy Jazz Ensemble.

"Our primary goal was to expose young audiences to jazz in an effort to not only educate them about their music—as it is America's indigenous art form—but to help develop jazz audiences for the future," said bassist and educator J.B. Dyas, the Monk Institute's vice president of education and curriculum development.

Every jazz musician has quintessential moments early in life that make a profound impression. One of Watson's moments happened at age 21 while watching Clark Terry perform during a student field trip to the University of Minnesota. "I remember times when artists came to our high school and junior high school and performed for us," said Watson, former musical director of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. "Being able to interact and see a professional musician close up, those are the times in my life I'll never forget. I feel a big responsibility when I go in there with these students. I play my best and represent jazz to the best of my ability. I try to be open with them, and hopefully affect one or two of them."

—Robin James