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No simple music lesson

Jazz as part of curriculum
is no longer confined
to band room

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When schools across the nation struggle to keep music programs off the budgetary chopping block, teachers and students at three Charlotte schools find that a particular music genre has far more to teach than mere appreciation of an artist or composer. Music, jazz in particular, has become a great informant of American history and culture, as revealed through last week's visits by jazz notables to Myers Park and Harding University high schools and Northwest School of the Arts.

Jazz drummer Thelonius Monk Jr., son of the legendary jazz pianist and composer, traveled to Charlotte with renowned saxophonist Bobby Watson, vocalist Lisa Henry and rhythm section performers Thursday and Friday, Oct. 12-13, to introduce jazz as a curriculum adjunct. But music is not the subject of focus, nor are jazz lovers the target audience.

For the general assembly

The curriculum, developed by J.B. Dyas of the Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz, is created primarily for social studies teachers and for the general student

body, not just for the students in band. "We designed it so that any high school teacher – (of) social studies, English, American history, whether they're musicians or not, whether they're jazz fans or not – can follow the curriculum step by step," Dyas explained. He said many teachers like to use the "Jazz in America" curriculum during Black History Month in February. "By the time they finish the eight lesson plans, they really see how jazz relates to American history and culture, and *that's* the focus," Dyas said.

"I think that that should be stressed," agreed Anthony Jones, band director at Harding. "Jazz is the only music being created right here in America. ... Over the years it's had its milestones through (performers like) Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Tommy Dorsey. But it also traces its history through connections with the Civil Rights movement, speakeasies, Prohibition, cabarets, heroin addiction – all cultural developments (whether advances or problems) that have an association with jazz."

Monk and company conducted a general assembly program, vocals master workshop or a jazz band clinic at each school they visited. The general assembly served to introduce the curriculum concept and provide an overview of the genre.

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Bobby Cochran/CW photos

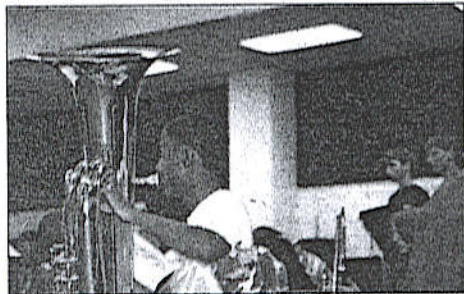
On Friday, Oct. 13, the band room at Charlotte's Northwest School of the Arts turned into the coolest jazz clinic in town when Thelonius Monk Jr., Bobby Watson, Lisa Henry and other jazz artists gave pointers to band director C. Shaie Marcus' 10th- through 12th-grade performers.

Jazz

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"What we try to do for the overall student body is to demystify jazz so that at least it gets on their radar," Monk said. "Often kids have heard of this jazz thing; some of them might even have heard from their parents that it's an important American cultural treasure. They don't know exactly why, they don't know exactly how it works. ... It's so different from popular music. It's so hard to discern what is the song, who is the star, who is the background."

C. Shane Marcus, band director at Northwest, said the presentation tools and Monk's explanations during the general assembly were exceedingly helpful to the uninitiated. "To have a real advanced player like (Monk or Watson) who knows



Monk and company made subtle yet impactful changes to the players' positions, moving the tuba player next to the saxophonist and shifting the trumpet section to the rear so sound would carry better.

it so well, it can really break jazz down into something digestible. Once you know what to listen for, you enjoy it a lot more."

Rubbing shoulders with the pros

Although the tour's main goal was to bring the jazz-as-history-aid curriculum to entire schools, the jazz pros didn't miss an opportunity to give more individualized attention to music students through clinics. Monk, Watson and Henry listened to selections and offered advice on grouping and positioning of instruments, punching up solos and more. The Monk institute's guitarist, pianist and drummer sat shoulder to shoulder with their high school counterparts, suggesting adjustments during each number.

"It was phenomenal," commented Jones of a similar clinic at Harding. "It really gave the kids the opportunity to see guys who do this for a living." He had his ninth- through 12th-graders research their big-name guests prior to their arrival. "This is the legacy right here. To see this guy (Monk) in our room talking to us was great for them. He was really down to earth, called it like it was."

At the Northwest clinic, Bobby Watson repositioned the trumpet section to the rear and had the trumpeters stand. Lead trumpeter Jules Meyers and his section eagerly complied, to immediately audible



Artful instructors from the Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz include curriculum writer J.B. Dyas, saxophonist Bobby Watson, pianist Richard Johnson, drummer Otis Brown III, vocalist Lisa Henry, bassist Derek Nievergelt and drummer Thelonius Monk Jr.

results.

"This is really about attention and inspiration," Monk explained. "Jazz musicians are motivated by inspiration. It's not the calisthenic that classical music is. If you study a certain scale and certain technique in a classical context, then you can perform. Jazz doesn't quite work like that; it's a little more spiritually anchored, and so a lot of it is philosophy and attitude."

Underscoring jazz's double duty as a unique musical genre and a vehicle for

learning U.S. history, Marcus repeated Monk's words from the general assembly: "Jazz is like a democracy. You have individual freedoms but you also have a responsibility to the group." □

Want to know more?

The Jazz in America curriculum promoted by the Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz is available at no cost at www.jazzinamerica.org.