

Rocky Mount TELEGRAM

ROCKY MOUNT, NORTH CAROLINA

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Monk Institute unveils national jazz curriculum

By **NATALIE JORDAN**

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In a dark auditorium Monday, a conversation took place through music.

About 600 students sat clapping their hands, waving their arms and tapping their feet as a five-piece jazz combo from the Thelonious Monk Jazz Institute spoke to each other with their instruments.

"Oh, we thank you for that love," said guest vocalist Lisa Henry. "We love you Rocky Mount."

The nonprofit organization introduced Jazz in

America – a national jazz curriculum – the day before what would have been Monk's 89th birthday at Rocky Mount High School.



T.S. MONK

chairman of the institute's Board of Trustees and son of the late jazz pianist and composer. "It was the people here in Rocky Mount to

See *INSTITUTE*, 2A



Telegram photo / Jason Ivester

A jazz combo from the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz performs for students Monday at Rocky Mount High School.

INSTITUTE

From Page 1A

recognize him moreso than in the nation. So we thought it was only appropriate to start here."

After Henry sang, J.B. Dyas, vice president for education and curriculum development for the institute, gave a little lesson in the musical genre. He explained what musical notes were, what chords were, the difference between notes and chords and how to read jazz on a sheet of music.

Dyas said in jazz, musicians communicate through the chords they play.

"When you listen to jazz, you have to get into it," Dyas said, having the students interact by clapping at the top of the beat. "The more the audience is into it, the more the band is into it."

Henry began to scat a melody as the students clapped along, and the band played their perspective parts. That mini-performace garnered a standing ovation.

Dyas said in jazz there are different types of grooves, like a shuffle grove. Henry sang "Kansas City," in which she incorporated "This Little Light of Mine," with participation from the students.

"I thought it was good," said senior Emma Dare Barnhill. "It really involved the students, and they did a good job incorporating the educational piece, too. So it was fun."

Drummer Otis Brown III said it seemed like the students enjoyed the program, like a connection was made.

"The kids were so enthusiastic," T.S. Monk said. "It's about them for us. Each state has its differences, so we never know how they will perceive us. But as you move south, the blues is a dominate feature, and that's the thing about jazz - it's fluid. And I think they saw how jazz can connect to them."

The institute was established in memory of Thelonious Monk, who was born Oct. 10, 1917, in Rocky Mount and died in 1982. The institute brings together jazz musicians to teach and offers young musicians college-level training. The institute's education programs are provided free to the public.

"Twenty years ago, there was a campaign to build a Thelonious Monk community center, and from that came the institute," T.S. Monk said. "There was so much resistance in the beginning because people thought we were institutionalizing jazz, but in the years, there has been support. And I am humble."

The organization introduced its national educational program after receiving support from the National Endowment for the Arts. The organization will be traveling to other North Carolina high schools during the week, doing band clinics, vocal classes and assemblies.

But the tour, with a push from civic leaders in Rocky Mount, started at 308 South Tillery St.

"It was interesting. The songs were more toward our age, and (the band) was good," said Braden Langston, who heard the genre for the first time.