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Sax player aims to shape jazz audiences of the future



EMRA ISLEK

Alto saxophonist and educator Antonio Hart has been in Pittsburgh this week for workshops at area high schools.

BY BOB KARLOVITS
TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Antonio Hart says good and bad memories of teachers are the reason he spends so much of his time in the educational side of music.

"It's a question of working hard and giving back," says the jazz star, who also is professor of jazz saxophone at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College in New York.

He also works in outreach programs of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz and has been in Pittsburgh all this week doing workshops at area high schools with a quintet of young jazz players from Miami.

Hart, the quintet and singer Lisa Henry this weekend will show their talents to the non-high-school public at Little E's, the Downtown jazz club.

J.B. Dyas, vice president of education and curriculum development at the Monk Institute in Los Angeles, says it is a pleasure to have someone like Hart in the program.

"Antonio is always teaching," he says. "They'll be in the van, and he'll be teaching. They'll go out bowling, and he'll be teaching."

Hart, 40, says that is something that is rooted in his days in school.

"It's hard to forget the teachers who always had time for you," he says.

"Teaching isn't just about the academic side. It is about showing how you can make things possible in life."

Hart grew up in Baltimore, attended the Berklee College of Music in Boston and then went on the road with such performers as trumpeter Roy Hargrove and sax legend Jimmy Heath.

This Monk program, Dyas explains, is called the Peer-to-Peer program. In it, students from nine arts high schools the institute supports make visits to other cities to share their thoughts with fellow students.

Accompanying the touring students are jazz stars such as Hart, saxophonist Bobby Watson or drummer and Pittsburgh native Jeff "Tain" Watts.

The arts schools are in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Houston, Dallas, Miami, New Orleans, Kansas City and the District of Columbia. Besides the visit here, students from the Los Angeles school will visit Kansas City this year.

Hart, Henry and the Miami quintet did workshops at the Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts, Downtown, the Rogers Creative and Performing Arts Middle School in Homewood, and Allderdice High School in Squirrel Hill. Today, they are at Brashear High School in Beechview, and Friday will be at the University Prep High School in Oakland.

Antonio Hart

With: Lisa Henry and a quintet from Miami's New World School of the Arts

When: 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday

Admission: \$10

Where: Little E's Jazz Club, 949 Liberty Ave.

Details: 412-392-2217

"We are trying to develop jazz audiences of the future," Dyas says. "If I walked into a school and said, 'You ought to check out jazz,' they wouldn't listen to me, but when other students come in, they

begin to see what it's all about, how you can develop a passion for this music."

Hart says the teaching aspect has, in some ways, come to dominate his career. While he still tours with his own band and performs with bassist Dave Holland and the Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band, the academic work has taken much pressure off him.

He doesn't feel as compelled to put out albums that might or might not represent fresh thinking, he says with a tone of relief.

"It's allowing me to grow mentally and spiritually," he says.

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