

Los Angeles Times

MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2009

The White House and all that jazz

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Continuing to spotlight the importance of the arts, First Lady Michelle Obama will host the first in a series of White House musical workshops today for 150 middle and high school jazz students, including 14 Los Angeles-area teenagers from the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz.

The event will bring together young students from several jazz education and outreach organizations throughout the country to interact with and learn from jazz sensations Wynton, Branford, Jason, Delfeayo and Ellis Marsalis.

Students will participate in seminars where the pros will teach them American history and how it has shaped jazz, improvisation through different jazz styles and Duke Ellington's musical influence.

They will then attend a concert at the White House featuring Cuban musician Paquito D'Rivera and 14-year-old jazz pianist Tony Madrugá.

Although the Monk Institute moved its college performance program from USC to New Orleans in 2007, the organization continues to work with local schools, including Eagle Rock High School, Walter Reed Middle School and North Hollywood High School.

Rewarding 14 of the most gifted and hardest-working students from the program will help foster their passion for the music and help them find their own authentic voices, said J.B. Dyas, vice president of education and curriculum development at the Monk Institute.

"These jazz students are the jazz musicians of tomorrow,"

he said.

Sammy Miller, 18, a recent graduate of the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, couldn't believe he'd be working with the musicians he's only heard and played along with on his record player.

"Usually when I'm learning jazz, I learn it from people who are great teachers, but these guys who we're going to be working with are some of the creators of jazz," he said. "To get a chance to work with them is beyond rare."

Miller has been playing the drums since he was 5.

"It's great that jazz can be honored in a workshop setting at a national level," he said. "Jazz usually doesn't get much recognition, but having the president recognize it in such a way is beyond amazing."

Stunned when he was told a week ago that he was one of the students selected to go to the White House, 16-year-old Bryan Johnson is embracing the chance to improve his musical abilities.

"I'm here just playing my horn and all of a sudden the opportunity comes ... to play my horn for people who actually ... love music and can do stuff for our school," said Johnson, a trumpet player from Washington Prep High School.

Javon Harvey, 16, a saxophone player at Washington Prep, was equally excited. "It's a big opportunity to go to such an important place with important people," he said.

The next sessions of the White House Music Series will focus on country and classical music. Dates and guests haven't been announced.

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