

Jamison Ross Wins Prestigious 2012 Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Drums Competition at Star-Studded Kennedy Center Gala

By Danny R. Johnson

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Since the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz was co-founded in 1986 by the family of the late American jazz musician Thelonious Monk, opera singer Maria Fisher and Thomas R. Carter, its current president, it has held to a rigorously thorough standard of discovery, welcoming flashes of inspiring and irresolute new artists who are stubborn innovators and superb improvisers. At the Institute's vivacious September 23, 2012 celebration at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, located in Washington, DC, Jamison Ross exemplified all of the notable attributes and was awarded the Institute's 2012 First Place Winner of its International Drums Competition.



Jamison Ross. Photo: Paul Morigi/Getty Images for The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz

Presented by the world-renowned Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz in partnership with Cadillac, this year's Presenting Sponsor, the stellar event featured the finals of the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Drums Competition with performances by first place winner Ross, 24, from Jacksonville, Florida; Justin Brown, 28, of Richmond, California; and Colin Stranahan, 26, of Denver, Colorado. Brown and Stranahan were named second and third place winners, respectively. At stake was more than \$100,000 in scholarships and prizes, including a \$25,000 first place scholarship and guaranteed recording contract with Concord Music Group. This year's competition judges included a distinguished panel of drummers: Carl Allen, Brian Blade, Terri Lyne Carrington, Jimmy Cobb, Peter Erskine, and Ben Riley.

The evening also featured a star-studded "Women, Music and Diplomacy" Gala honoring former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright with the Institute's 2012 Maria Fisher Founder's Award. In accepting the award Secretary Albright said, "Jazz is America's most distinctive form of art, and this Institute is a world treasure. By sending its Ambassadors abroad, the Institute helps to spread the gospel of Jazz to every corner of the globe." In the spirit of the evening, Secretary Albright took her place behind the drums and performed a moving rendition of "Nessun Dorma" with Chris Botti and George Duke.

“The heartbeat of the bandstand – the drums has been an inspiration to every culture from the genesis of mankind,” said Institute Chairman Herbie Hancock.

Herbie Hancock is absolutely right to state that the drummer is “the heartbeat of the bandstand.” In all, a jazz drummer is responsible for at least a half-dozen instruments. Typically he or she would use the right foot on the bass drum pedal, the left on the high-hat pedal, the right hand wielding a stick on the ride cymbal, and the left holding a stick to play the snare drum or tom-tom.

What distinguished some of the immortal great drummers like Max Roach, Buddy Rich, Gene Krupa, and Art Blakey from their contemporaries of today was their sheer virtuosity, their flexibility and subtlety, excellent sense of timing, that kept other listeners and the musicians involved every step of the way. These jazz drummers and the countless unsung others such as: Jimmy Cobb, Ray McKinley, Zutty Singleton, “Papa” Joe Jones, Kenny “Klook” Clarke, and Billy Higgins, just to name a few, all had a different style and approach to drumming.

The 2012 Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz Drums Finalist and First Place Winner, Jamison Ross, plays drums exceptionally well and within the spirit of the masters!

Ross’ style and drumming persona reminds us so much of the late drummer Sonny Payne. Ross was definitely right at home in the elements with his tambourine in his right hand while drumming with his left, Ross played with an infectious drive and color, which were insinuated with abrupt pauses, exaggerated technical flourishes, and dramatic shifts in dynamics as he mesmerized the audience to James Black’s “Magnolia Triangle” and his original “Shrimp ’n’ Grits.”

A show-stopping version of “My Funny Valentine” was performed by Ms. Aretha Franklin, who could only top that with an electrifying “Respect” in honor of Madeleine Albright. The evening’s hosts included Tipper Gore, Herbie Hancock, Helen Mirren, Thelonius Monk Jr. and Billy Dee Williams. Through the competition and its numerous educational programs, the Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz is committed to identifying and training the world’s leading young jazz musicians who will preserve the traditions of jazz while expanding the music in new directions.

For more information on the Institute, please visit www.monkinstitute.org.



GRAMMY Lifetime Achievement Award-winner Aretha Franklin performs at the Thelonius Monk International Jazz Drums Competition and Gala Concert at The Kennedy Center on September 23 in Washington, DC. Photo: Paul Morigi/Getty Images for The Thelonius Monk Institute of Jazz

