

# Hancock rouses Jazz Network crowd

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Lamenting the decline in arts funding at U.S. public schools as "a national disgrace," music legend Herbie Hancock electrified a capacity audience of more than 1,600 during his keynote address Thursday at the [6th annual National Jazz Education Network conference](#)

"Can you even imagine our existence without the arts?" he asked during his speech at downtown's Manchester Grand Hyatt, where the JEN conference concludes Saturday. "The (result) would be a bleak, soulless earth, struggling to communicate."

An Oscar-winning composer and 14-time Grammy-winner, Hancock rose to prominence in the 1960s as the pianist in the Miles Davis Quintet. In the early 1970s, he became an internationally acclaimed band leader in his own right. A 2013 Kennedy Center honoree, he is the chairman of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz and a professor at the Institute's Jazz Performance program at the UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music. The founder of the International Committee of Artists for Peace, Hancock is also an honorary Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. In that capacity he three years ago created International Jazz Day, held on April 30, which is celebrated in 197 countries around the world.

"Cultural diplomacy (and) using jazz to solve problems and build bridges between disparate people is not a new idea," he said, "but it's time has come."

Hancock's wide-ranging remarks quoted both the Italian philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and pioneering San Diego medical researcher Jonas Salk. He also stressed the importance of creativity and thinking outside of the box, while urging music educators to update their teaching methods to better connect with a young, multi-tasking generation.

"It's time for old curriculum to play catch-up and reflect the modern world we live in," said Hancock, 74, who performs here March 20 with fellow jazz piano great Chick Corea at Jacobs Music Center's Copley Symphony Hall

Hancock said he would like UNESCO to help launch a national Math, Science & Music program that would promote the arts as a tool for learning in other fields. He also cited the Monk Institute's Peer-to-Peer program, which teams 11 high school jazz ensembles with jazz legends to perform at other high schools, thus enabling young audiences to hear and see the music performed by their contemporaries.

"Young people are much more responsive to, and influenced by, kids their own age," Hancock noted.

His comments struck a chord with many young musicians in attendance, including Monica Nava, a 16-year-old pianist from El Centro's Center Union High School.

"I really liked it when he said kindness is a true form of wisdom," said Nava, who performed Thursday at JEN with her high school's jazz ensemble.

San Diego-bred jazz piano phenom Chase Morrin, 21, was also impressed by Hancock's speech.

"He has this amazing way of mixing in his spiritual beliefs with his tangible programs at the Monk Institute," said Morrin, who is **now a senior at Harvard University** and performs at JEN on Friday with his trio and Saturday with a big band. "He's really great."