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ED Staff Learn About Excellence and U.S. Values From Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Musicians

TUE, MARCH 5, 2013 5:30 PM

In celebration of Black History Month, the Department of Education's [Student Art Exhibit Program](#) (<http://www.ed.gov/student-art-exhibit>) and Blacks in Government collaborated to provide employees and guests an opportunity to enjoy a jazz performance—an informational performance created by students of the [Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz](#) (<http://www.monkinstitute.org/>) and rising star jazz saxophonist [Tim Green](#) (<http://www.timgreenmusic.com/>). Dr. JB Dyas, vice president for education and curriculum development at the Institute, affirming that jazz is America's indigenous music, said it was "invented only 100 years ago [and] ... evolved from the African American experience here in the U.S."



Dr. JB Dyas directs the musicians at a rehearsal before the show.

Student musicians selected from the Institute's [National Performing Arts High School Program](#) (<http://www.monkinstitute.org/education/performingarts/>)—Sterlin Brown (tenor saxophone, Baltimore School for the Arts), Sabrina Dias (drums, Arts High School, Newark), Cooper Lynn (piano, LaGuardia High School of Music and Art, New York), Rahsaan Pickett (guitar, Arts High School) and Joseph Quiles (bass, Arts High School)—traveled to the nation's capital to rehearse for the first time together and to perform the hour-long program. Using the musicians to demonstrate his points, Dyas engaged the audience in a tutorial on the fundamentals of jazz music, comparing it to a language and a discourse, which the ensemble members use to communicate both instructions and emotions. For Dr. Dyas, "Jazz is important in schools because it teaches our students ... American values like teamwork, unity with ethnic diversity, democracy and the vital importance of really listening to one another." In order for the musicians to recognize their moment to play a solo and to improvise—the main activity in jazz—they have to watch and listen for cues from the other members.



Left to right: Sterlin Brown, Joseph Quiles, and Sabrina Dias perform.

Deputy Secretary Tony Miller opened the program by addressing the need for continued arts education funding in public schools. "All arts – jazz, performing arts, visual arts, digital arts – are such an important part of all of our culture," he said. "Now, we all recognize the importance of STEM – science, technology, engineering, and math. We recognize how an understanding of math, science and technology is essential to being prepared for the jobs of the 21st century. ... I want to encourage us to broaden our notion of 21st-century skills from STEM to STEAM, ... where, in addition to science, technology, engineering, and math, the arts are recognized for the important 21st-century skills that they help develop."

After the performance, Tom Carter, president of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, closed the program by addressing the globalization of jazz music, stating that "these students are having a huge impact on our world."

Employees at the Department are very grateful to the Monk Institute for providing the opportunity to have world-class student musicians perform at our agency.

In the green room before the show, the young artists provided insight on how music education affects their lives and what they plan to do after high school graduation.

Sterlin, age 17: "Music has made me a better person, student and professional. It has affected me positively and boosted my confidence to speak up and represent myself. I aspire to go to college and learn about the music

industry and entertainment. I would like to work in studio and recording.”

Cooper, age 17: “Music and jazz require cooperation, give and take. You learn how to deal with people politely, take and give criticism and interact with others. I will be attending Columbia University in the fall to study music and would like to be a journalist. That way I can write about music during the day and play gigs at night.”



Tim Green (left) on alto saxophone and tenor saxophonist Sterlin Brown harmonize on a number.

Rashaan, age 16: “Jazz has taught me great time management. My grades have improved; I think differently and have become a good listener. I want to go to a music conservatory and major in music education, become a teacher and a performer. I teach guitar lessons in my spare time. I love to learn and see my students grow.”

Sabrina, age 17: “I started out playing the keyboard but it was too slow for me. I wanted to play the drums and my parents eventually said ‘OK.’ I started playing at church and I have been playing ever since. I want to be an athletic trainer and continue to play the drums in church.”



Sabrina Dias explains how she found the keyboard too slow and moved to the drums after getting her parents’ OK.

Joseph, age 16: “Music helps me see patterns in geometry. My grades in math have really improved. I want to go to college and study music performance and education.”

Tim Green, professional jazz recording artist: “The Monk Institute is a family and it’s great to be included in this family again as a professional and help to build the next generation. I advise young musicians to take advantage of every opportunity.

Continue to practice and study hard in school and always look for a mentor.”

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Chareese Ross is an information resource specialist in the Office of Communications and Outreach, and is on temporary assignment with the Student Art Exhibit Program.

Official Department of Education photos are by Paul Wood.

The Department’s [Student Art Exhibit Program](http://www.ed.gov/student-art-exhibit) (http://www.ed.gov/student-art-exhibit) provides students and teachers an opportunity to display creative work from the classroom in a highly public place that honors their work as an effective path to learning and knowledge for all. To visit the exhibits or for information about exhibiting, contact Jackye Zimmermann at 202-401-0762 or at jacquelyn.zimmermann@ed.gov (mailto:jacquelyn.zimmermann@ed.gov).

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