

ED's Second Annual Jazz Informance Celebrating America's Music and Values

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As part of [Jazz Appreciation Month](#) (JAM), the Department hosted its second annual jazz informance (an informational performance) on April 4th with a full house of D.C. public charter school students, educators, arts leaders, and ED staff—jazz lovers and jazz novices alike. Under the direction of J.B. Dyas, vice president for education and curriculum development at the [Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz](#), students from [Arts High School](#) in Newark, N.J., part of the [National Performing Arts High School Jazz Program](#), and special guest recording artist, trumpeter [Terrell Stafford](#), director of Jazz Studies and chair of Instrumental Studies at Temple University, performed during the event.

ED's acting General Counsel Phil Rosenfelt gave opening remarks on how the Department's inaugural Monk informance in 2013 broadened his musical horizons and finally allowed him to appreciate jazz—something that had eluded him his entire life. “I saw the individuality and the unity, working together, in innovative ways, to address a common goal. I finally got it. And it was special that I got it at the Department where we value learning so much—breaking out of our barriers and stereotypes and comfort zones ... and that's what jazz and the Department are all about,” said Rosenfelt.

In the informational portion of the event, Dyas explained that jazz was born in America and is, “America's greatest artistic gift to the world,” enjoyed by people of every ethnicity on every continent. He described the improvisational process—90 percent of every jazz performance—as a conversation, both among the musicians and between the musicians and the audience, using music instead of words. Dyas later asked the musicians to illustrate this conversation as they “talked” to one another with their instruments.

As Dyas said, jazz represents important values that students need to learn, such as “teamwork and unity with

ethnic diversity.” Students from the Monk jazz program, in a recorded video, spoke of the many positive qualities they have learned through playing jazz. Among them are:

- A sense of responsibility within a group
- Drive to become a better musician
- Ambition to pursue music education in college
- Greater knowledge of other cultures
- Collaboration

The Arts High Jazz Quartet comprising Rahsaan Pickett on guitar, Galo Inga on piano, Joseph Quiles on bass, and Derek Fykes on drums, joined by Stafford, played an up-tempo selection of tunes. These included Herbie Hancock’s *Cantaloupe Island*, *Dexterity* by Charlie Parker, and *Ask Me Now* by Thelonious Monk. The playing was lively and nicely balanced, while solo breaks gave each performer a chance to shine. The performers created a textural, musical journey with variances in speed, tempo and rhythm over a sustained steady flow.

After the performance, the student performers answered questions from the students in the audience, including, “Why did you start playing music?” Fykes’ answer: “It’s something I love. It has to be a passion.” And, “How much do you practice?” Answer: Several hours daily, including doing a lot of listening.

All in attendance thoroughly appreciated hearing such great music and learning how it is performed, as evidenced by the frequent toe-tapping and spontaneous applause! And another jazz convert was born.

Sarah Sisaye of OESE wrote: “Before today, I wasn’t too crazy about jazz. I grew up listening to it, but having played the flute for 9 years, I am more comfortable with classical music. However, the performance/lecture today, made it very accessible. I will definitely be listening to more jazz! I even won a poster [of John Coltrane] and was able to get all the musicians to sign it—I’ll be hanging that on my wall!”