

The bassist and his young jazz aces



performed in his native Philadelphia with a septet of players involved with the Monk Institute. (Christian McBride)



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By Shaun Brady, For The Inquirer

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Christian McBride is still a couple of months shy of 40, but on stage at Chris' Jazz Cafe on Friday night he suddenly felt old. Introducing "King Freddie of Hubbard," a composition from his debut album, *Gettin' To It*, the Philly-born bassist suddenly stopped, turned to the drummer, and asked, "When were you born?"

"Nineteen ninety-four," came the response - the very year *Gettin'* was recorded.

The Thelonious Monk Institute All-Star High School Jazz Septet, seven 16- and 17-year-olds selected from across the country, performed several selections from that recording with the bass great himself. Their two sets Friday were the culmination of a weeklong stay in Philly, where the young musicians gave workshops to students in several high schools.

After the septet's blazing run through Art Blakey's "Miss B.C.," which opened the first set in high-spirited hard-bop fashion, McBride made his entrance, introducing the band as "young geniuses." No one on stage was quite ready to shoulder that compliment, but McBride's next statement hit the mark: "They're pretty doggone good."

Standouts included boisterous Dallas-based drummer Michael Mitchell and trumpeter Adam O'Farrill, whose clarion eruptions demanded attention. The latter is something of a ringer, a third-generation member of the legendary O'Farrill family, preceded by his composer grandfather Chico and pianist father Arturo, who was in the audience.

Pianist Antonio Madrugá, from Miami, showed confidence throughout the night, particularly when engaging the evening's other special guest, 1994 Monk Institute vocal competition winner Lisa Henry. The singer playfully took every opportunity to croon double entendres in McBride's somewhat sheepish direction.

For his part, McBride refused to go easy on the kids, playing with his

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usual rapid-fire elasticity and crisp wit. The end of the first set became a trial by fire, as he simply announced a blues and launched into a brisk walk, leaving the band to sort things out. Nerves were evident on the faces and in the (at times) tenuous playing of several teenage jazzmen, who are all involved in the Monk Institute, a nonprofit educational program established in the name of the legendary pianist. But their talents became more evident as the night wore on and the reality of being "in the presence of Christian McBride," as tenor saxophonist Jacob Shulman put it, settled in.

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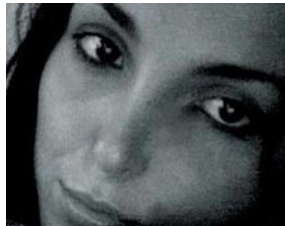
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