

Stars, Jazz, President Clinton and Inspiration



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This year the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz held its annual Jazz Competition and All Star Gala Concert at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles on November 9th. The event featured music legends, aspiring young talents and former President [Bill Clinton](#), who received the Institute's Founder's Award for his lifelong contribution to the expansion of music education in schools around the world.

The Gala was hosted by the Institute's Chairman, Herbie Hancock, legendary producer Quincy Jones, and actors Don Cheadle, [Kevin Spacey](#), Billy Dee Williams and Goldie Hawn. The event featured a dizzying compilation of outstanding performances from the likes of Hancock, Spacey, [Pharrell Williams](#), Queen Latifah, John Mayer, Chaka Khan, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Dianne Reeves, Arturo Sandoval and many more. The three finalists of this year's Competition were featured in their final round performances; the first prize award was awarded to trumpeter Marquis Hill, a gifted young artist from Chicago who gave a stirring performance demonstrating both his formidable dexterity and expressive musicianship.



Thelonious Monk, Quincy Jones, Bill Clinton, Herbie Hancock, Dianne Reeves, and Kevin Spacey attend the 2014 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Trumpet Competition at Dolby Theatre on November 9, 2014 in Hollywood, California. (Photo by Imeh Akpanudosen/Getty Images for Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz)

Proceeds from the Gala Concert support the Monk Institute's jazz music education programs across the U.S. and around the world. All of these programs are free of charge to the students and schools they serve. The Institute was founded in 1986 by family members of the legendary jazz pianist Thelonious Monk, Thomas Carter and the late Maria Fisher, a former opera singer, philanthropist and lifelong devotee of music. It offers conservatory-level training to the most gifted jazz performers of tomorrow as well as unique music education programs in the public schools.

As Thomas Carter, the President and Co-Founder of the Monk Institute, put it: "The Thelonious Monk Institute serves music education and helps students to develop important life skills including cooperation, creativity, curiosity, self-confidence and a respect for their own and others' cultural heritage. The Institute's programs have a huge impact on the future of music and are truly changing lives."



Musician John Mayer performs onstage at the 2014 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Trumpet Competition at Dolby Theatre on November 9, 2014 in Hollywood, California. (Photo by Imeh Akpanudosen/Getty Images for Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz)

Bill Clinton spoke eloquently about the importance of arts education and his own personal experiences as a young music student. He studied the tenor saxophone throughout his youth and reflected on the importance music made in his life. He admitted that he wasn't talented enough to become a professional but spoke about the confidence being a trained musician gave him as a leader. He said that the improvisatory skills learned through intensive training in jazz contributed to his diplomatic skills and his ability to think laterally during negotiations. He even cited a meeting with an

unnamed head-of-state trained as a classical concert pianist. President Clinton jokingly accused him of not being as flexible as he was during their negotiations over the resolution of a problem because jazz afforded him the improvisatory skills that classical music could not!



Actor Kevin Spacey performs onstage at the 2014 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Trumpet Competition at Dolby Theatre on November 9, 2014 in Hollywood, California. (Photo by Imeh Akpanudosen/Getty Images for Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz)

Several performances made indelible impressions during the evening. Kevin Spacey's rendition of "Fly Me to the Moon" again reinforced his unexpected talents as a crooner. Pharrell Williams sang a jazzed-up version of his hit song "Happy" accompanied by the uniquely gifted Herbie Hancock after which Pharrell made repeated bows to Hancock showing his deep respect for the master. The four divas of the evening, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Chaka Khan, Queen Latifah and Dianne Reeves each convincingly belted out tunes with their own unique style showing why they are the masters they are. Lastly,

John Mayer accompanied the blues master Taj Mahal. Mayer displayed his virtuosic mastery of the guitar: I think he could interpret almost any genre on his instrument and do so convincingly.



Musician Herbie Hancock (L) and singer/songwriter Pharrell Williams perform onstage at the 2014 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Trumpet Competition at Dolby Theatre on November 9, 2014 in Hollywood, California. (Photo by Imeh Akpanudosen/Getty Images for Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz)

Congratulations and kudos are in order for the Thelonious Monk Institute, its visionary President and co-founder Thomas Carter and Chairman Herbie Hancock. Their work in music education has been an inspiration for several generations of talented young musicians who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunities they have had. The proof is in the pudding, and the importance and inspirational message of the Institute's work was in full evidence Sunday night.