

## **First International Jazz Day means more than music to Herbie Hancock**

By Greg Thomas / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

For Herbie Hancock, jazz is more than just music. It is a unifying life force.

And one so important that he has led a movement to celebrate it with its own day: Monday is the first-ever International Jazz Day, and the United Nations will be stage a concert to be simulcast on the Internet to millions.

Co-hosts for the night include Robert De Niro, Michael Douglas, Morgan Freeman and Quincy Jones.

Among the performers joining Hancock will be Tony Bennett, Terence Blanchard, Jimmy Heath, Chaka Khan, Wynton Marsalis, Christian McBride, Dianne Reeves, Esperanza Spalding and a slew of music greats from around the world.

George Duke will serve as musical director.

Hancock, who has been the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue since July, spoke with the Daily News about Monday's significance.

### **NEWS: When did the idea for International Jazz Day come to you and how?**

**HANCOCK:** I'm the chairman of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. I've been involved with that organization since its inception, more than 25 years now. Tom Carter is the president. He and Thelonious Monk Jr. brought me on board ... Conversations with Tom Carter brought this idea for UNESCO to declare an International Jazz Day. And it was Tom Carter's idea that it be in April because it's Jazz Appreciation Month. That made a lot of sense. ...

We were both aware of how jazz has played an important diplomatic role throughout its history.

Jazz has been used to bring people together. That's one of the great values of this music. Yes, it was born in America, out of slavery, basically. That's where the roots come from, and ultimately from Africa. But it couldn't have developed in Africa, it had to develop here: It's got the American soil on it.

But ... what is an American? Americans are from everywhere. This may be the largest immigrant country in the world. So this music represents the world anyway. Born from the African-American experience, yes, but it's really about the human experience. It's really about the ability of human beings to take the worst of circumstances and struggles and turn it into something creative and constructive.

That's something that's built into the fiber of every human being. And I think that's why people can respond to it. They feel the freedom in it. And the attributes of jazz are also admirable. It's about dialogue. It's about sharing. And teamwork. It's in the moment, and it's nonjudgmental, at its best.

When you play on stage, you can't be sitting there judging what the other musicians are playing and say, I wish he didn't play that. Or, I want him to play this right now. You can't be thinking that way! That goes out the window. Whatever anybody plays, your thought is, how can I make it all work?

And so built into the fiber of jazz are really life lessons too. If you look at life, it's filled with all kinds of things that if we look at it from a judgmental standpoint, we'd say I wish this didn't happen, I wish that didn't happen. But if you don't judge it from that standpoint, and look at it as just an opportunity, it's: how can I make this challenge work?

That's a Buddhist viewpoint.

### **NEWS: How does Buddhism play into your Goodwill Ambassador work?**

**HANCOCK:** It plays a very crucial role in the way that I look at everything. This is actually my 40<sup>th</sup> year of Buddhist practice. It's Nichiren Buddhism. Throughout the 40 years, I periodically get these revelations. It happens to anyone who practices Buddhism. And it happens to people who don't practice Buddhism too ...

I've been playing music for 65 years, since I was 7 years old. I've been thinking all my life: I'm a musician. Well, this revelation that hit me, maybe 15 or so years ago [was] wait a minute: To my daughter, she knows I'm a musician but I'm her father. To my wife, I'm her husband.

When I'm talking to my next-door neighbor, it could be about anything, not just music. When I vote, I'm not just thinking about musicians. I'm thinking about living on this planet, here in America, and exercising my right as a citizen.

So it led me to realize that I manifest myself in a variety of ways ... And so does everybody else. But we usually define ourselves by the thing that we do.

Being a musician is what I do, not what I am. But what links all those different aspects is one thing: I'm a human being. ... When I define myself as a human being, I define myself just like everybody else.

We're all in this together. ... So I'm much more interested in using various aspects of what I'm capable of doing to work toward the greater good. And to not limit myself to thinking that the only thing I could do to contribute is music. Consequently, being a Goodwill Ambassador falls right into that. It's to serve the advancement of humanity and the human spirit. There's so much conflict in the world today, and in many cases, ridiculous conflict.

So I want to be part of the energy and movement to bring us together as global citizens.

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