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CORAL REEF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL: Coral Reef band jams with New Orleans teens

**THE THELONIOUS MONK INSTITUTE OF JAZZ STOPPED BY CORAL REEF SENIOR HIGH
ON THURSDAY, TEACHING THE KIDS A LESSON IN GROOVE AND RHYTHM**

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As 4/4 beats tapped, the audience of 260 moved their heads left and right, matching every cymbal crash with snappy claps.

It was not a scene at a smoky San Francisco jazz club, but instead took place at Coral Reef Senior High, where students were entertained Thursday by a seven-piece band made up of teenage students from the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts.

As part of the Thelonious Monk Institute's Peer-to-Peer Jazz Education Tour, the septet -- three saxophones, a piano, guitar, bass and drums -- played at four Miami-Dade high schools this week. They traveled 670 miles to deliver a message: jazz is an American art and needs to be kept alive.

"We're promoting the music and creating a new generation of listeners," said Jim "J. B." Dyas, vice president of education and curriculum development for the institute.

There was also a special guest: saxophonist and recording artist Antonio Hart, who joined the students as they played his composition Down and Up. Hart's fingers skidded across the keys of his sax as he played one of the eight solos in the song. The wild cheers after every solo and hundreds of tapping shoes let the band know the hardest work was done -- the audience had become part of the jam.

During the group's next "informance," as Dyas put it, the group broke down Sonny Rollins' Tenor Madness, instrument by instrument, into a musical blueprint. As the piano played a few simple chords, Dyas explained to the students how a 12-measure chorus could turn into a 10-minute jam session: just add a bass and drums.

Then a guitar. Then a sax. Then three more. As each one soloed, Dyas explained what was going on.

"There's no better example of democracy," he said. "It's individual freedom but with responsibility to the group."

When the hourlong session was done, students rushed to the stage to speak to the young musicians.

"The goal is to teach kids about teamwork and democracy via jazz. They're learning about America's music and American values," Dyas said, walking through the school's quiet hallways. Nearby another famed guest performer, vocalist Lisa Henry, gave one of the school's choral classes a quick lesson about delivering moving performances.

"The goal is to deliver something you don't particularly like and still make the audience feel it," she told them.

She had senior Analeah Rosen read a song, The Last Words of David, as if she were at a poetry slam, using sharp inflection and a serene tone.

"You can't get the story across to me if you don't know it," Henry said, asking the class to read songs like poetry and to experiment with the tempo in order to get comfortable with the material. Within minutes, she had the class singing a hip-hop Star Spangled Banner, with freshman Kevin Postigo beat-boxing a rhythm with his mouth. After that, she had them scatting.

Across the hallway, Hart directed Coral Reef's jazz band, fine-tuning their sound as they played Sea Changes by Alan Baylock. Finding the band's sound too strong, he separated the booming saxes from the airy keyboard and had the class imagine they were thinking about whoever they were in love with.

"Music is life," he told them, "so play it that way. Now, one, two, three, unh ..."

Heavy bursts of brass turned into smooth swell, the staccatos sharper and inflections more precise.

John Millado, a 16-year-old sax player in the Coral Reef band, was excited to be learning a few tips from Hart, along with watching the young musicians from New Orleans perform.

"With them coming, they're helping us follow the fight path -- do what we want, follow our hearts."