

Bill Clinton honoured for jazz advocacy

Former US president plays at all-star gala concert



By **CHARLES J. GANS**

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Image Credit: AP
This Nov. 9, 2014 photo released by the Thelonious Monk Institute Of Jazz shows, President Bill Clinton, left, and Herbie Hancock after Clinton was presented with the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz's honorary Founder's Award in Los Angeles. Clinton was presented with the award at an all-star concert Sunday night. (AP Photo/Thelonious Monk Institute Of Jazz, Steve Munding)

Former President Bill Clinton spoke out on behalf of “frustrated jazz musicians” like himself as he accepted an honorary award for his decades of jazz advocacy.

Clinton was presented the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz’s Maria Fisher Founder’s Award on Sunday during an all-star gala concert at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. Quincy Jones and Herbie Hancock presented the honorary award to the former leader of The Three Kings jazz trio from Hot Springs (Arkansas) High School, praising Clinton for showcasing jazz at the White House during his presidency.

In accepting the award, Clinton cited the non-profit Monk Institute's efforts to give countless young people in schools a chance to learn about and play jazz.

Clinton recalled his own experience growing up in Arkansas: starting to play the saxophone at age nine, going to summer camp and playing 12 hours a day until his lips bled, playing the grooves off of 33 rpm records and reading *Downbeat* magazine cover to cover.

"I could not stand to hear myself play until I was 15. By the time I was 16, I thought I was getting pretty good and I looked in the mirror and I said, 'Would you ever be [John] Coltrane?' and the answer was no. So I had to become a fan."

An all-star band, including saxophonists Wayne Shorter, Jimmy Heath and Joshua Redman, played *Flying Home* before Clinton accepted the award. And after his remarks, singer Dianne Reeves serenaded Clinton with the Gershwins' tune *Love Is Here to Stay*.

Other musical highlights included Kevin Spacey making like Frank Sinatra as he sang *Fly Me to the Moon*, Pharrell Williams teaming with Hancock to do a jazzy version of his hit *Happy*, and John Mayer and Taj Mahal performing Mississippi Delta Blues legend Robert Johnson's *Dust My Broom*.

The concert included the finals of the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, which this year was devoted to trumpeters. Marquis Hill, of Chicago, was declared the first-place winner by the panel of judges after performing the standards *If I Were a Bell* and *Polka Dots and Moonbeams*. As the winner, he received a \$25,000 (Dh91,000) scholarship and a recording contract with the Concord Music Group.