

# Music educators pass the jazz torch

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Christian McBride, the multi Grammy award-winning bassist, likes to say that jazz is a lifetime journey of learning and discovery.



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**Music makers:** Above, jazz legends - drummer Billy Hart, at left center, and bassist Christian McBride, right - are surrounded by some of the more than 75 young musicians from Montclair and neighboring communities who attended the two-week-long Jazz House Kids Summer Camp held recently at The Salvation Army's Montclair Citadel on Trinity Place. Below, members of a Jazz House Kids ensemble rehearse for an upcoming concert.

For the past two weeks, dozens of young people hopped on that road, and they did it alongside some very impressive musical company. More than 75 youngsters spent their late August summer vacation practicing their instruments, learning new compositional and improvisational techniques, and sitting in on workshops featuring some of the top jazz working professionals who make their homes in Montclair and nearby towns. It was all part of the Jazz House Kids (JHK) Summer Camp and it unfolded every day beginning on Aug. 9, in The Salvation Army Montclair Citadel on Trinity Place.

"It's all about the cycle," said McBride who serves as the camp's creative director. "It's the cycle of nurturing and passing on information. If you want to be part of any tradition like Jazz, it's a necessity. I always said that that if I were ever in a position where I could give to younger musicians what older musicians gave me when I was a teenager, consider me there."

McBride wasn't the only one "there." Camp Director Mike Lee said the JHK teaching faculty roster read like a who's who of the jazz world, including Billy Hart, Freddie Hendrix, Bruce Williams, Dave Stryker, Radam Schwartz, Oscar Perez, Michele Rosewoman, and others.

Lee said the product of that faculty's nurturing will be on full display over the next few days. Several of the JHK ensembles will perform at Trumpets Jazz Club tonight, Thursday, Aug. 19, and again tomorrow, Friday, Aug. 20, in twice nightly shows at 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. "On Saturday, from 1 to 5 p.m. those ensembles, along with some of our faculty, will perform at the Jazz House Kids Jazz Festival in Nishuane Park." Lee said. "It's a free festival and we hope the community will come and join us for a day of great music."



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On Monday of this week, the camp's senior ensemble performed two concerts at the famed Dizzy's Club-Coca at Lincoln Center in New York, a rare opportunity for the teenaged musicians to showcase their emerging talent in one of the nation's famed jazz venues. Lee said Montclair is able to offer high-level jazz instruction and jazz performances unlike any other community.

"Montclair is a hot bed of jazz," Lee said. "We have many prominent musicians who live here and the towns around us, and many of them work with us as jazz educators."

Melissa Walker, the jazz vocalist who founded Jazz House Kids and serves as its executive director, said that same level of instruction and dedication to teaching will continue throughout the coming year. She said JHK will continue to offer weekly after-school instructional programs in its second-floor offices at 14 South Park St.

"We'll be auditioning in September for a Jazz House Kids big band," Walker said. "We'll also have small ensembles of eight to 12 students, and we'll begin a vocal youth choir for students 9 to 14 years old. And we'll be starting a Music Fun 101, which will introduce kids who don't play an instrument yet to music." Along with the music instruction, the summer camp faculty also provided the students with a living history of jazz.

Drummer Billy Hart told the JHK campers about an encounter he had as a young man with the legendary Papa Jo Jones, one of the most influential drummers in jazz history. After spending a few days peppering Jones with questions about style and technique, Jones passed on some sage advice to the young Hart.

"He said to me that 'The problem with you younger guys is that you don't plan ahead as you play. You don't compose,'" Hart told the JHK students. "I've remembered that advice all my life and I still try to compose as I play," Hart said.

For McBride it was "an honor and thrill that someone like a Billy Hart, who I first enjoyed on recordings as a preteen and then saw him in person as an older teen," was able to join us for the two weeks. The students were just as impressed.

Drummer Robin Baytas, who graduated from Montclair High School in June, was dazzled by the caliber of jazz performances the students took in every day during the camp's afternoon showcases. "Every showcase was just amazing," Baytas said. "We saw Billy Hart, Dave Stryker, Mike Lee and, of course, Christian McBride. It's such a pleasure to be here," he said. "It's great that they spend time with us."

To have these artists at the camp is incredible. I can go to Billy with any question. And he loves to answer them."

McBride said it was experiences like that when he was a teen that lit a fire in him that helped make him a successful jazz artist.

"I see that same fire here in these young people," he said, looking out at an ensemble rehearsal. "In the next decade, I know I'm going to run into a number of students from this program in recording studios or on a gig. I'm very sure of that. It's the cycle coming full circle."

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Montclair Jazz legend Christian McBride, right, discusses Jazz and improvisational playing techniques with some of the more than 75 young musicians attending the two-week Jazz House Kids summer camp held in the Salvation Army's Montclair Citadel.

Camp Director Mike Lee, right, works with Jack Ferguson.





Young Montclair musicians compare notes after a rehearsal during the Jazz House Kids summer camp. The group includes, from left, Wallace Rooney Jr., Max Ahren, Brelle Walker, Robin Baytas and Julian Lee.

Montclair's Billy Hart, left, and Christian McBride discuss jazz and improvisational playing techniques with students.





Vocalist and Jazz House Kids Executive Director Melissa Walker rehearses with one of the jazz ensembles.

Members of one of the jazz ensembles rehearse under the direction of guest artists.



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Montclair residents Bruce Williams, left, and Mike Lee perform during free afternoon jazz showcase in the Salvation Army's Montclair Citadel. Williams is an instructor and Lee is the director of the Jazz House Kids summer jazz camp.

Montclair residents Christian McBride on bass, saxophonists Bruce Williams, center, and Mike Lee, right, join drummer Steve Johns performing at a free afternoon jazz showcase in the Salvation Army's Montclair Citadel during the Jazz House Kids summer jazz camp.





Montclair Jazz legends Billy Hart, left, and Christian McBride, right, are surrounded by some of the more than 75 young musicians from Montclair and surrounding communities who attended the two-week long Jazz House Kids summer camp held in the Salvation Army's Montclair Citadel.