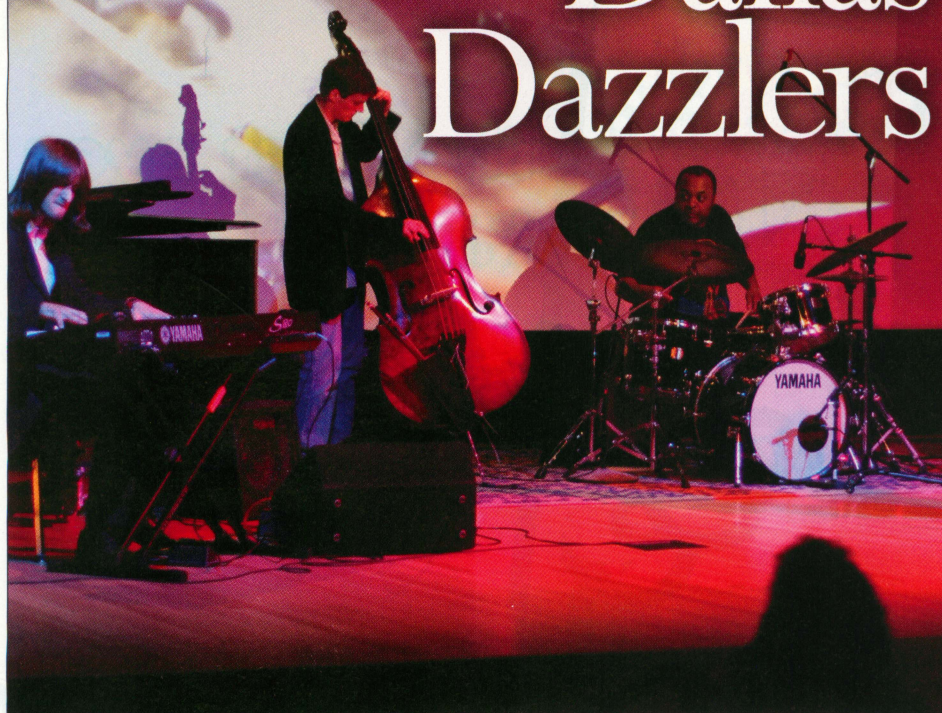


Dallas Dazzlers



Booker T. Washington High School takes jazz study to the next level.

In the center of the Lone Star State, there's a school that's five-star when it comes to music. Since opening its doors in 1976, Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas, Texas, has received national praise for its superlative music education programs. Through its membership in the Network for Performing and Visual Arts Schools, it has also functioned as a prototype for magnet schools throughout the United States and Canada.

Booker T. Washington's Jazz Studies Program shines particularly brightly. Having earned international recognition, with more than 200 DownBeat Student Music Awards, and boasting such acclaimed alumni as Norah Jones, Erykah Badu, and trumpeter Roy Hargrove, it's truly a talent training ground.

It wasn't always so. When Bart Marantz became the director of Jazz Studies in 1983, the program was on shaky ground. But Marantz immediately recognized an exceptional level of raw ability in the students. "I knew that I could do anything with this kind of talent," he recalls. "I wanted to go to the IAJE [International Association for Jazz Education] and NAJE [National Association for Jazz Education] conferences, and we did that. Then I wanted to record albums, and we did that as well, with both the big band and the smaller combos."

With only 34 students enrolled each year, the Jazz Studies Program is as selective as it is special. After gaining acceptance by auditioning, students attend classes in comprehensive musicianship (theory), improvisation, arranging, and the music business. There are 11 ensembles to choose from, including a Latin group, a percussion ensemble, a full orchestra and a string orchestra, three choirs, and a MIDI ensemble; students compose for these groups as well as perform in them. And through support from the Thelonious Monk Institute, Marantz brings in a professional clinician every

week of the school year to work with the kids. "We take Dallas-area kids first and then out-of-district students as far away as Denton and Forney," Marantz says.

In addition to superstars like Jones, Hargrove, and Badu, Booker T. Washington alums include performers in other artists' bands. Tenor saxophonist Keith Anderson is one—he has toured extensively with pianist Les McCann and bassist Marcus Miller and has composed and recorded music for Hargrove. In 2008, Anderson played on three GRAMMY-nominated albums, by Kanye West, gospel artist Fred Hammond, and Miller, respectively.

There's no question in Anderson's mind that his time in the Jazz Studies program at Booker T. Washington was unique and life-changing. "Everyone was always fighting for a spot in the program, and I think that's because it was really geared toward nurturing your gift," he recalls. "We were doing things that no other schools in the district were doing."

"These students are committed and disciplined," Marantz says. "They've given up things that a lot of kids wouldn't give up in order to pursue their dream and their careers. Instead of going out, they're at home practicing four or five hours a day, writing compositions, or preparing to record or play with the GRAMMY Big Band."

But while the students' level of commitment is indeed impressive, Anderson says his old teacher is the driving force behind the program's success and recognition. "To begin with, Bart has a unique teaching style. He'd push us hard, but he'd also have us watch performance and educational videos to keep us inspired. And he was really there for us—even if you had personal issues going on, Bart was there to help you out."

For Marantz, the ultimate payoff is watching his students thrive. "Over my 27 years here, it's been a magical ride," he says. "I have a young artist in ninth grade who has just come into the program, and I think he will be a superstar. And to work with kids like that, well, I wouldn't trade it for anything." **T**