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GETTING A LEG UP

Four prime magnet programs groom the next generation of jazz greats

BY WILLARD JENKINS



Booker T. Washington's Bart Marantz and alum Roy Hargrove

These issues could be debated forever, but several cities can point with great pride to the progress made at their arts magnet high schools. And within some of those schools jazz education is thriving. Educators from four such high school-level institutions were asked to provide a clear picture of what transpires within their walls and how their work impacts their community. All are experienced and active performers in addition to their teaching and administrative responsibilities. And each of their institutions operates with similar goals.

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JARRARD HARRIS, A SAXOPHONIST and member of Jon Faddis' *Chicago Jazz Ensemble*, is not only the youngest of our crew of respondents, his four-year-old jazz education component at the Chicago Public Schools Advanced Arts Education program is also the youngest of the four programs we examined. A native of Louisville, Ky., he developed at the University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.

The 10-year-old Advanced Arts Education program is at 66 Randolph Street in downtown Chicago. "We're strictly arts, so our students will be at their home schools in the morning, and they come down to the Gallery 37 Building from 2-4 p.m. every day. We're a pullout program, so technically we're a Chicago Public Schools program, but we have students that come from all the different high schools," says Harris. "They've always had vocal arts, a heavy visual arts program, dance, theater."

Though his school operates until 4 p.m., Harris says "the kids like to play so much that most of the time we go past that. The public school system provides them with public transportation to get from their school to the gallery building. When they arrive at 2 we just start out playing. We might take a tune like 'Blue Bossa' and listen to the tune, play a couple of different versions of it, talk about different artists' approaches to the tune, [discuss] how not to sound like a play-along

At a time when many communities are wrangling over the development of charter schools and their perceived benefits, it wasn't that long ago when similar arguments were raised about magnet schools. Were such schools establishing a dangerous hierarchy and harmfully segregating a few students from traditional public school education? Or were these hothouse environments ideally geared toward nurturing the best and brightest in various concentrations? In the case of arts magnet schools it became a matter of determining whether or not this was a Band-Aid approach to the draconian cuts arts education has endured over the last 30 years.

record, or how we can be creative with it. An important thing with young kids is having them bring their own musical element to it. So it's like, [how] can you approach the music in a way that your peers might find fresh?

"That's also a big part of the program: peer to peer, going out and playing for other schools. When kids see people their age playing [jazz] they're more apt to dig it, versus if all the time you've got teachers and adults going out and doing performances. If they see their peers play it, [jazz] becomes ten times hipper. So that's a big part of what we do here—go out to different schools and perform."

Harris' jazz class is kept at the manageable level of a smaller ensemble, and he's quick to capitalize on his school's downtown location in Chicago. "We expose [students] to music everywhere possible," he says. "We can walk to the Jazz Showcase, we can walk to Andy's Jazz Club, the Jazz Record Mart. ... This year they've started having jam sessions at the Jazz Showcase and students will stick around for that, or if it's a 21-and-up establishment I'll accompany them so they can go to jam sessions, sit in and meet other jazz musicians. That's an important part of their education. Playing, more than the academic study of it, is the most important thing. If you don't learn anything from all the theory that we talk about, you'll learn the most from just playing together all the time and going out and hearing music."

This being only the fourth year of his jazz program at the Advanced Arts Education program, Harris has to play catch-up with his three peer educators in terms of producing illustrious alumni. "My students are all in college right now. Last year I had a drummer named Michael Pilot who was so good he would be his lesson teacher's sub for gigs. You could send him on anybody's gig. We've had about four kids go to Oberlin on scholarship; [another student] is going to the University of Miami where they've started a quintet with scholarships. We have one student going to Berklee, we have a student here at Columbia College, we have students at the University of Illinois-Chicago, a student at Juilliard. Even if the kids don't want to play [post-grad] they'll have a greater appreciation for music."

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TRUMPETER BART MARANTZ, DIRECTOR OF JAZZ studies at the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts for the last 26 years, studied at the University of Miami, Indiana University and the New England Conservatory of



Students in the Chicago Public Schools Advanced Arts Education program



Music. Marantz studied with David Baker, Jaki Byard, George Russell and Phil Wilson, among others.

Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, the modern update on a historic black community high school of the same name in the Dallas public school system, occupies new and refurbished facilities. "We've been in this building a year and a half now," Marantz says of the 33-year-old arts magnet school. "They refurbished the original building, which is a state landmark, and added a new building and a new theater onto the existing structure."

Marantz's program in Dallas accepts kids from fairly far away. "Some of our outstanding players have come from as far away as Denton or Colleyville, Texas, and these are kids who are taking two trains and a bus every morning to get here for their nine o'clock class," Marantz marvels. "We offer [classes] like jazz improvisation, jazz arranging, jazz keyboard harmony, Jazz Combo 1, Jazz Combo 2 and

we do have a vocal division in jazz, the Lab Singers. We have no big band because of attrition," explains Marantz. His feeling is that most of these young musicians' future opportunities will be in combos. "The first seven years I did have a big band. What I used to do was, from the big band I would take out my best players, those who understood styles, texture, dynamics, technique and all the things that make a small group happen, and pull them into the top jazz combo—Jazz Combo 1. And as soon as I could I got rid of that big band, because where are you gonna earn a living playing in a big band today? How many Maria Schneiders are there? I could probably count on one hand our big bands today.

"We've produced 22 albums over the school's history and we've ended up doing a lot of original work. Kids are writing tunes for small group. There are only so many Roy Hargroves who can walk in with a big-band chart in high school," Marantz says, naming one of his illustrious alums. "I probably had three or four kids during those first seven years I was here that wrote for the big band."

Detailing his curriculum, Marantz says, "The Jazz Improvisation course I teach is really three different classes. ... On a Monday I can show videos and talk about jazz history; on Wednesdays I'm talking jazz improvisation from a II-V-I, modal, vertical, horizontal and patternistic standpoint, and getting these kids listening to bebop and having them understand that, at a slow tempo, they can accomplish this wonderful music and grow into it."

Marantz, who averages 20-25 students studying jazz out of a music department that totals 200-225, finds no shortage of after-school opportunities for his in-demand combos, including playing a significant role in his school's successful capital campaign. Says Marantz, "They built this [new addition] with the intention of having more kids and having a state-of-the-art institution. They had to raise \$30 million-plus locally. ... And who did they rely on? They relied on these kids who play jazz and commercial music. They would have jazz pianists, jazz trios, the jazz combo. ... So the jazz and commercial music was the way these funds were raised. On top of that, when they had their [grand opening], who did they bring in? They brought in [alums] Roy Hargrove, Norah Jones, Erykah Badu and Edie Brickell—that's all jazz and commercial music. In many cases the jazz ensemble is the one that feeds financially the rest of the [music] department. We bring in thousands of dollars a year."

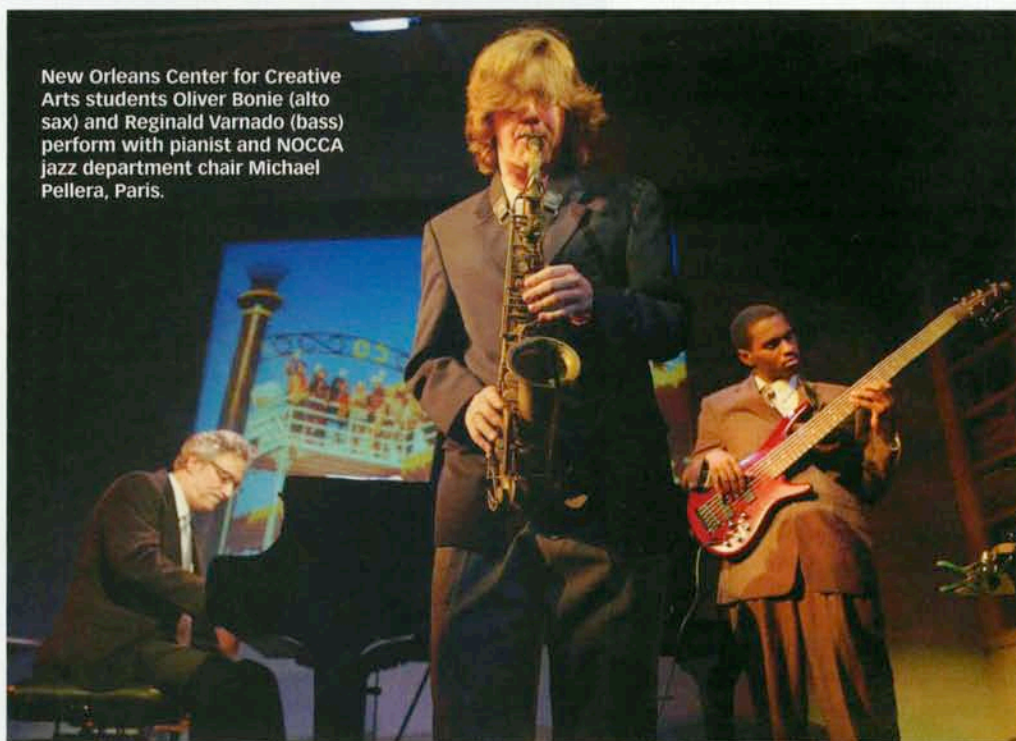
In addition to Hargrove, Jones, Badu and Brickell, Marantz points proudly to his sons Matt and Luke Marantz, both BTW grads currently emerging professionally. His program has produced young musicians who've shared bandstands ranging from Ray Charles, Kirk Whalum and Kirk Franklin to Cedar Walton, Pat Martino and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Additionally, Hargrove and Badu have drawn from BTW alums for their bands.

MICHAEL PELLERA, CHAIR OF THE JAZZ DEPARTMENT at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA), is a pianist by trade who has performed with a broad range of musicians, including Chet Baker, Dave Liebman, Wynton Marsalis and Buddy Rich, and such Crescent City musicians as Tony Dagradi, Johnny Vidacovich, Bill Summers and Phillip Manuel.

The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts is a jewel of the otherwise beleaguered New Orleans Public School system. "[NOCCA] is a bright new star that has a good reputation," Pellerla says of the sparkling facility located in the city's Bywater neighborhood.

NOCCA is an arts adjunct for talented New Orleans area students. "They come to us half a day; we begin our classes at 1:15," says Pellerla. There have been talks about making the program into a full academic school, but like many things in New Orleans those talks were shelved in the budget-slashing wake of Hurricane Katrina.

At NOCCA, "All the jazz students take what we call applied classes,



which are combo/jazz improvisation classes. They start out taking three levels of college-level music theory," explains Pellerla. "We would be doing them a disservice if we weren't offering college-level music theory, so we take that very serious. In recent years we've broken it up to theory and musicianship, [which] is more of the ear training, dictation, sight-singing variety." One program that appears to be unique to NOCCA is what Pellerla describes as their "performance class," which meets on Fridays. "Some Fridays it will be just jazz students performing. We have three divisions of music, [including] classical instrumental and classical voice. Every other Friday we have the whole music department together giving a very organized recital, so they're performing quite a bit. We break our weekly program into two programs: The first one goes from 1:15-3:45, then we have other students that come in from 4-6," Pellerla explains.

NOCCA is flexible as far as assembling a big band. "We don't

Trumpeter Roy Hargrove performs with Booker T. Washington's prestigious Combo I at the 2003 Monterey Jazz Festival. (Also pictured is saxophonist Matt Marantz, now a Manhattan School of Music graduate.)



always have a full big band. We tend to concentrate more on combos," says Peller. "It's easy to hide behind a big band because kids love the power of being in a big band and playing in an ensemble, and a lot of kids aren't really that motivated to improvise. Your individual talent is what's going to carry you. The days are over when you're gonna get a job with Stan Kenton or Buddy Rich. Sometimes on Friday I do this thing we call 'house band,' where you get a trio to play a couple of pieces and you just call people up and they're supposed to get up there, turn around to the band and call a tune, turn around to the audience and announce the tune and do it. The parents will be there, everybody in the department will be there, and we just really stress that it's going to be about your individual talent. We spend a lot of time on their stage presence and being comfortable in their own skin. I hate to say it, but New Orleans musicians tend to have a reputation for not being good readers and sloppy ensemble players, but we're working on that."

Being in New Orleans offers NOCCA the relatively unique resource of a community where music is deep in the DNA, where kids are encouraged to take up instruments early and often become professionals at an earlier age than in most communities. "We are living in a thriving music culture," agrees Peller, "and some kids come out of the church. We had two kids come in last year who were already playing in a brass band, just ninth graders. I've found that you show these kids a little phrase or something and they just play it with so much more confidence than maybe someone else would play it, because they're in that kind of boisterous atmosphere. There's so many musical families [in New Orleans], people related to each other, this kind of mentor relationship ... so it is unique. I wouldn't say a large percentage of our kids are like that, but maybe 15-20 percent are coming to the table that have already played some kind of rhythmic music. So if you say, 'This is jazz,' they can keep a beat, they're used to communicating music. Not everybody can do that, even someone who has practiced a lot—they can't communicate music."

Peller's school boasts staggering alumni, including the Marsalis brothers, Donald Harrison, Harry Connick Jr. and Nicholas Payton. "Our most recent grad who is starting to make some waves is [pianist] Jonathan Batiste," a young man with an old soul, as comfortable with Jelly Roll Morton and Professor Longhair as he is with McCoy Tyner. Another NOCCA grad to listen out for is the very promising young drummer Joseph Dyson, currently studying at Berklee, and a regular member of Harrison's Congo Nation.

"Joseph could be the next Brian Blade," says Peller. "He has almost the same background as Brian, and his father's a preacher." Be on the lookout also for NOCCA grad and pianist Sullivan Fortner, who spent the summer on the road with Hargrove.

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DISTRICT NATIVE DAVEY YARBOROUGH, CHAIR of instrumental music at Duke Ellington School for the Arts in Washington, D.C., is a graduate of the University of the District of Columbia. As a saxophonist and flutist he studied under Sonny Stitt and Frank Wess. Yarbrough and his wife, the vocalist Esther Williams, are building the Washington Jazz Arts Institute, in part as a farm system for his work at the Ellington School.

What had been the Project for the Arts was renamed Duke Ellington School for the Arts in 1974, the year Duke passed. "Western HS," located in Georgetown, "decided to change its name and the arts program moved in," says Yarbrough, who was hired for the 1977-78 school year as a student teacher. "I went back and started as a counselor in 1984 and became band director in 1986." Ellington and Booker T. Washington are both full-time, full-curriculum high schools.

Yarbrough's Ellington School program—befitting its namesake—still operates a traditional big band, which is compelled in part by the

The Booker T. Washington Big Band
with guest Wynton Marsalis, 1985.



size of his student body. "In the jazz program I usually have somewhere between 40-60 students. The jazz program is more than just the jazz orchestra. I have a program five days a week where I work with students who are interested in playing jazz and learning jazz but are not necessarily in the jazz orchestra at that time; those classes run up to 35 kids, where the jazz orchestra program is maximum 26 and averages anywhere from 16-20. I have several small jazz ensembles and I teach a jazz theory class for the ones who are interested in the chord changes, arranging or even doing some composing.

"I'm a native of D.C. and I've watched this evolve and that's one reason this was so palatable to me," says Yarborough. "The school system is built on having one band director, and that band director has to do everything: They have to do classical, they have to do the orchestra, they have to do marching band, they have to do jazz band. ... So they can't really dedicate enough time; they have to rely on students being able to take private lessons or being involved in other programs in order to get the most study. That's one reason I do the theory class and the ensembles at 7:30 in the morning, so that kids who are interested in jazz have enough time. ... We have a dual curriculum, a full academic as well as the arts curriculum, where we have eight different disciplines."

Yarborough is developing the Washington Jazz Arts Institute (WJAI) in part as a feeder program for Ellington School. "It's also an enrichment program for the kids who are currently at Ellington. It actually grew out of the need of being able to isolate and locate kids at a younger age to have them prepared for the D.E. audition, so that we could get them at a stronger rate and take them further. What I wanted to do with the WJAI is that once kids knew they wanted to pursue music, jazz in particular, they would have a support system.

"Right now [WJAI is] serving kids that are 11, 12 on up to about 21-22. We have a Sunday program that starts in October and ends in

April and goes from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at People's Congregational Church, and we have a five-week summer program." WJAI is in a vigorous capital campaign to build its own facility right on the church grounds.

Yarborough has seen his share of Ellington graduates go on to prominence, including Wallace and Antoine Roney, Marc Cary, Ellington Orchestra member Chuck Royal and bassist Amin Saleem. "Ben Williams is currently at Juilliard in grad school; bass player Corcoran Holt is now living and working in New York, and Eric Wheeler is still living in town and working everywhere."

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ONE OF MANY COMMON THREADS BETWEEN EACH of these programs is the influence and assistance provided by the Thelonious Monk Institute, especially its jazz education ambassador J.B. Dyas. NOCCA's New Orleans locale affords an opportunity to have some of the Monk Institute's visiting masters drop by from its graduate studies program at Loyola, and Monk grad students often have teaching assignments at NOCCA. The Monk Institute enables Harris' Chicago program to provide free lessons for his students with any jazz artist in the city they'd like to study with. Last year his kids went on a Monk-supported trip to Salt Lake City with alto saxophonist Antonio Hart to do peer-to-peer performances at schools. And the Monk Institute has provided master classes for Duke Ellington School students.

While observers have long lamented the severe loss of instrumental music in education today, these arts magnet schools and others like them are becoming pillars of public school systems across the country. Hopefully other systems will use such stalwarts as Harris, Marantz, Peller and Yarborough and their schools as examples for the programs they're building. **JT**