

"We live in a society where everything is a competition, and the way you prove how worthy you are as a teacher or student can depend on how you are rated in a competition. In a lot of ways, that can be detrimental to the educational process because directors can become so focused on winning that they forget about the esthetics and about learning." —**TRUMPETER TERELL STAFFORD**

"I always try to send the message that regardless of how we place on a sheet of paper, performing is about communicating with people and touching the audience." —**SCOTT BROWN, DIRECTOR OF THE ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL JAZZ BAND IN SEATTLE**

"Having competition so prevalent in music education could unintentionally send the negative message to young players that music is about pass or fail, when it's actually about expression and connecting—a transference of emotion. If someone is striving to be honest and to be a good person and to convey that in their music, then that's priceless. I wouldn't want them to feel that because they weren't as flashy a player as someone else, and perhaps didn't win the competition, that it was an indication of a lack of validity or merit."

—**PIANIST BENNY GREEN**

"A lot of people won't participate unless there's a competition; it seems to get all the schools excited and get the parents into it. On that level, as a motivator, it's cool. But in a perfect world, we wouldn't have to compete to get people excited about music."

—**GUITARIST BRUCE FORMAN**

"The main competition or challenge is with ourselves, and our own limits; to better ourselves and get ourselves to a higher level. Then it doesn't matter who else we're beating. Get yourself to play better tomorrow than you were playing today."

—**VOCALIST ROBERTA GAMBARINI**

Marsalis: Everyone has their own style of teaching and every student will respond to personalities in a different way. Growing up, I had band directors who were hard on us and others who were more laid back, and I learned important lessons from both. The best teachers help students learn the life lessons so abundant in playing ensemble music. These lessons are driven home with more intensity under the spotlight of competition. The discerning ears of judges, the aspirations of parents and desire to satisfy your director create an intense atmosphere—but the best competition inspires kids to come together to accept criticism and to admire or console other students.

At our Essentially Ellington Competition, I have seen students compete to achieve the standard of excellence demanded by Duke's music. Kids are always cheering for each other and they always respect the best soloist or the most swinging rhythm section. There is a tradition of competition in jazz with the old school battles of the bands in which participants, sometimes 40 or 50 years later, express the deepest levels of respect for those they have battled. When you're competing for fun, to achieve and to play better under pressure, everyone feels the camaraderie and is inspired to deeper humility.

Is competition a necessary evil? It is found throughout our society, and therefore is it reasonable to assume that it should be common in arts education?

Klevan: Unfortunately, competition is a way of life in our society. The best players get the best jobs, gigs, etc. However, in an ideal world, competition in music should be more a spirit of encouragement and cooperation—especially in the area of education.

Marsalis: Competition is the way of nature. With music, a competition allows you to be around other people with similar interests. For the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, we look forward to playing in front of the students, teachers and families because they understand exactly what we're playing or trying to play and it feels great. An audience of students and teachers may be the best audience ever. In a music competition you can lose and still have a good time; in sports that's not the case.

McCurdy: Life for 15, 16, 17 and 18-year-old kids is hard enough—particularly when it comes down to being told that you aren't "good enough." They're going to have the rest of their lives to compete.

Clayton: If you have children—two sons or two daughters, let's say—and both work hard to create something, do you say to child No. 1, "Wow. Great job. This is the best between the two of you." And then, to the other child, do you say, "I know you worked equally as hard as your brother/sister, but your work is at a second place level. He gets the first prize." I don't see a difference in the damage that would be done in the home in such a situation and on stage with a band. Isn't the issue one of recognizing achievements made by the student or your child—something that we must do to show encouragement and support?

Why do you feel the way you do about competition?

Dyas: I have so many positive stories about the kids that try out for the Grammy band, or kids who come together at the Brubeck Colony and strike up lifelong relationships and then end up recording together and growing together and traveling and seeing the world together. Take Joshua Redman, who won the Monk Competition. It jump-started his career. The same with Marcus Roberts. Chris Potter didn't win; he came in second, but because of the competition he got some great gigs and now is well known. Would he still be who he is today without the competition? Who knows, but it did jump start his career. It isn't always about winning; it is about participating.

The competition process is educational and motivational. Some top