

## "Legend of jazz" mentors high school musicians

Contributed by KAILA HEARD

MIAMI &mdash; What do a 60-year-old and a room full of more than 100 teenagers have in common?

On the surface, not much.

But when eight-time Grammy award-winning artist Paquito D'Rivera places his lips on an instrument, the differences fade.

"The magic of jazz is that even if we don't speak the same language...jazz musicians can play together," D'Rivera told a group of high school musicians who participated in a question-and-answer session with D'Rivera.

The students witnessed his pre-concert sound check before a recent &ldquo;Legends of Jazz&rdquo; concert at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County.

With remarkable ease, the accomplished clarinetist and saxophonist, alternated between the two instruments, and played samples from the simplest jazz melodies to the most technically challenging pieces to demonstrate various techniques, dynamics and tempos.

&ldquo;He was awesome,&rsquo;&rsquo; said John A. Ferguson High School student Doralys Miralles. The 15-year-old baritone saxophone player was one of nearly 130 Miami-Dade County high school musicians gathered at the performing arts center on Nov. 7.

The students were from the jazz bands of New World School of the Arts, South Miami Senior High School and Academy of the Arts and Minds.

Michael Caicedo, a South Miami Senior High School senior, was excited by the opportunity.

"I always wanted to see [D'Rivera] play," said Caicedo. Raised with older brothers who were also jazz instrumentalists, Caicedo developed an appreciation for jazz music at a young age.

"I think [jazz] is the best way I have of expressing who I am," said the 17-year-old saxophone player.

Caicedo and the majority of the jazz students asked few questions during the roughly 20-minute session. Instead, they chose to simply watch and listen.

"[His playing] was everything I hoped it would be," revealed Caicedo.

Nevertheless, many students found just listening to be an invaluable lesson. Percussionist Rachel Gonzalez, also a student at South Miami Senior High School, said "I think we heard a lot of stuff that we can use."

Gonzalez described D'Rivera's playing as "amazing," and decided to follow some of D'Rivera's suggestions about the need for musicians to vary the volume level of their playing.

"As a drummer, I play really loud, so I need to consider [the dynamics]," Gonzalez said.

After the sound check, the students participated in a jazz workshop and later watched the actual concert.

D'Rivera was just one of the "Legends of Jazz" to perform during the premiere concert of the jazz series' Jazz Roots. The concert also featured talents such as the

Dave Brubeck Quartet and the contemporary jazz quartet, Fourplay, which features Bob James, Larry Carlton, Nathan East and Harvey Mason.

The Jazz Roots series is produced by the Arsht Center and jazz pioneer Larry Rosen, and is composed of five additional concerts. For each concert, jazz students throughout Miami-Dade County will be invited to attend.

In addition to the performances, the Jazz Roots series features a partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

The Arsht Center created a curriculum guide, with CDs and other materials, to teach the origins and evolution of jazz. The materials are to be distributed to Miami-Dade Public Schools in the fall, according to the center's media and public relations manager, Suzette Espinosa.

"The whole series is about making connections through music," said Espinosa, and "to teach the young generation about music and how music changes, but it all comes from the same place."

Ultimately, the Arsht Center hopes to attract members of the nearby ethnic communities of Miami-Dade County, which comprises 61.3 percent Latinos and 20.2 percent blacks, according to a 2006 U.S. Census Bureau Survey.

Carl Randolph, chairman of the Jazz Roots Advisory Committee, explained, "We have a building here and it should be reaching out to the community and one way of reaching out is showing them something they're interested in."

With Miami's diverse population of racial, ethnic and cultural communities, finding a common ground did seem like a daunting task. The center, however, decided to produce a series featuring jazz.

"The common root is the African drums," Randolph said.

Upcoming concerts in the Jazz Roots series will feature current jazz stars and pioneers such as The Count Basie Orchestra, John Laughlin, Patti Austin, and Sonny Rollins.

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Photo by Khary Bruyning. Paquito D'Rivera

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Jazz Roots Concert Series

WHEN: One concert a month until April 2009. The next concerts will be Dec. 12 and Jan. 16.

WHERE: John S. and James L. Knight Concert Hall at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, 1300 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami

COST: Tickets are \$25 to \$125.