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Jazz music program bopping to Loyola

*Monk Institute aims
to develop virtuosos*

By **John Pope**
Staff writer

One of the jazz world's foremost institutions — an organization dedicated to developing first-rate musicians who are teachers as well as performers — is moving to New Orleans from Los Angeles in an effort to keep jazz alive and thriving in the city where it was born.

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Performance, whose instructors have included some of the genre's top artists, is scheduled to announce its relocation today at a news conference at Loyola University, which will be its new home.

The move from the University of Southern California is the focal point of the institute's four-year initiative, "Commitment to New Orleans," designed to reinforce the importance of music to



The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Performance, established in the jazz legend's



name, pictured above, is moving to New Orleans from Los Angeles, and will be led with the help of trumpeter Terence Blanchard, right, a native of New Orleans.

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N.O.-born trumpeter to serve as artistic director at jazz institute

MONK, from A-1

the city's post-Katrina comeback by collaborating on programs with other colleges, setting up school- and community-level jazz programs, providing work for local musicians and persuading performers who have lived elsewhere since the storm to return home.

"Where else should we be?" said Terence Blanchard, the New Orleans-born trumpeter who is the college program's artistic director.

"We should be in New Orleans," he said. "It's the birthplace of the music. We can do a lot for the city; they city can do a lot for us. It's a win-win situation."

Program starts in August

The institute is committing at least \$5 million to this project, and it may well stay on at Loyola after completion of the four-year initiative, said John Snyder, coordinator of Loyola's music-industry studies program. He also was instrumental in persuading the institute to move.

"We're excited," institute President Tom Carter said. "The institute is very committed to the preservation and expansion of the art form of jazz. . . . Obviously, with the challenges in New Orleans, it's a perfect fit for everything the institute believes in."

Although the transfer is being disclosed today, the Loyola program will not get under way until August, when the fall semester starts, Blanchard said. In addition to learning from local and visiting virtuosos, each student in the program is expected to take classes, perform in public and teach in public schools to

train the next generation of musicians.

"They believe that people trained by these masters need to take that message to the people the next day," Snyder said. "It's passing on the tradition. Musicians are like that. That's what they do."

Among those scheduled to speak and perform today are Blanchard and other musicians who have taught at the institute: pianist and composer Herbie Hancock; saxophonist and composer Wayne Shorter; and drummer Thelonious Monk Jr., son of the pianist and composer for whom the institute is named.

The elder Monk, generally regarded as a towering genius of mid-century jazz, died in 1982. Blanchard played at his funeral while he was a student at Rutgers University.

Elite teachers, students

Monk's family and friends established the institute in 1986, and the college program started in 1995. Although there is no organized faculty, artists such as Wynton Marsalis, Lisa Henry, Dianne Reeves and Ron Carter have worked with students, spokesman Matt Burgess said.

The institute's main offering is a two-year, tuition-free post-graduate-level program for a few musicians — never more than 10 — who are chosen from as many as 200 applicants from all over the world. They go through a rigorous series of auditions and interviews in which they are judged not only for their solo work but also for their ability to perform with other applicants. After a final round of auditions for 30 finalists during the past weekend, the institute's latest group of students is to be announced today, and these

men and women are expected to play as well.

This program "gives Loyola a chance to contribute in an additional way to rebuilding the community," Snyder said. "I'm likening it to missionary work and Loyola's commitment to community service."

Institute students will be able to take courses in Snyder's music-industry curriculum to help them cope in an extremely competitive field — and, perhaps, develop careers and set up music businesses in New Orleans instead of going elsewhere to be successful.

"You're giving the people all the equipment they need to serve the world," Snyder said.

Loyola facilities a draw

The idea to leave Los Angeles came last fall from Blanchard, who said he had been wanting to do something to spur his hometown's recovery.

He mentioned the idea to Carter after a trip to Loyola, where Snyder showed him what he was doing with the music-industry courses, as well as the vacant space, including a studio, that the institute could use.

"John said this was a place I should be involved in," Blanchard said.

Snyder joined the wooing, although he said Carter was reluctant at first.

"I knew I had him when I read the institute's mission statement" about jazz education, Snyder said. "I said if the institute was going to be THE source of jazz education, we're in the place of greatest need. How can you turn your back on us?"

"A week later, he called back and said, 'Why not?'"

In addition to the prospect of filling New Orleans classrooms

and clubs with jazz, Carter said a factor that influenced the move was the fully equipped Loyola studio that will allow for broadcasts, Webcasts and podcasts of classes and other institute events.

"It's an incredible opportunity for the institute and our students, but very much for jazz," Carter said.

Although the institute will be based at Loyola, jazz masters and their programs will move from campus to campus, he said. There will be courses in the history and sociology of jazz for fifth-, eighth- and 11th-graders, along with master musicians who can work with promising youngsters.

"The thing I love about the Monk Institute is that we have a high school outreach program," Blanchard said. "This could be a great help. When you have young, talented guys teaching other young, talented guys, it can be very inspirational."

Blanchard, who will be working with his fourth group of institute students later this year, enjoys the work.

"When you start challenging these guys, you'd be surprised at the responses you get out of them," he said. "Being exposed to a lot of young talent, I'm very optimistic about what's going to happen to jazz in the future."

For Snyder, persuading the Monk Institute to come to New Orleans was vital for the future of jazz.

"The institute is coming to a city that people are abandoning," he said. "It gives people hope, a reason to think their work isn't in vain. It shows they care."

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