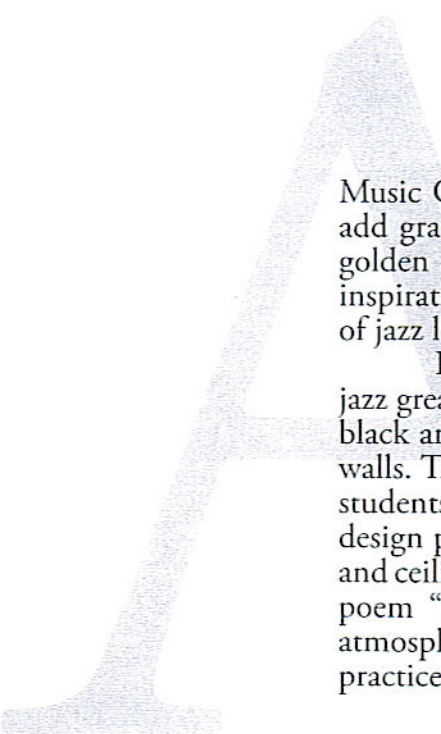


REVITALIZING THE CITY THROUGH MUSIC

THE MONK INSTITUTE'S IMPACT ON LOYOLA UNIVERSITY AND NEW ORLEANS

BY JESSICA WILLIAMS

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A room with glass windows on the fourth floor of the Communications/Music Complex surrounds an aged mahogany piano. The piano's ivory keys add grace to its appearance. The piano's seat is ragged and torn, but its fine golden strings command elegance. Students gaze at it in wonder and draw inspiration from its presence, because this grand piano once sat in the kitchen of jazz legend Thelonious Monk.

Practice room 427 holds two sleek black grand pianos handpicked by jazz greats Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter. These instruments match the black and white autographed photos of jazz musicians that adorn the room's walls. There is an interactive classroom between rooms 427 and 426, in which students from one room can see instruction taking place in another. A graphic design project is underway in another of the practice rooms; the room's walls and ceiling are being fashioned with swirling words of the anonymously written poem "I Am Music." These and many other resources produce a creative atmosphere for some of the world's best aspiring jazz artists to compose and practice. This is the acclaimed Monk Institute, here at Loyola's doorstep.

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ON THE RADAR

The Monk family and the late Maria Fisher, founder of the Beethoven Society of America, founded the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, a non-profit educational organization, in 1986. The Institute was created in memory of Thelonious Monk, the acclaimed jazz composer and pianist who believed that the best way to learn jazz was from a jazz master. The Institute has followed this philosophy for the past twenty years by bringing aspiring jazz artists under the instruction of world-famous jazz musicians. The graduate school chooses a select number of talented graduates from around the globe yearly. According to the program's website, the Institute's move to New Orleans is the largest program initiative in the program's history.

Housed at Loyola University, the Monk Institute offers graduate students a chance to participate in a world of jazz legends, and gives them the professional guidance that they can use to become legends themselves. Students in the Institute play under the instruction of renowned jazz musicians such as Terence Blanchard, Hancock, and Shorter, artists who offer personal insight on the craft as well as encourage students' individual exploration. Students use this training to play mentoring roles to Loyola undergraduates as well as to public school students in New Orleans. The program chose Loyola and New Orleans largely because the university welcomed them with open arms to jazz's birthplace, one of the best learning environments possible, according to Hancock.

Students in the Institute say that the greatest thing they will take away from this experience is a close relationship with their idols. Joe Johnson, a graduate student originally from the University of North Texas in Denton describes the unique nature of the Institute: "From no other place can students get the type of exposure that we receive...instruction from real professionals--legends who create and invent constantly-- makes all the difference." He says that one of the most important things his instructors teach him is to approach his music from an individual perspective. "(Instructors) really encourage personal identity (in the music). It's about being yourself and having the desire to perform and expand in your music, in addition to learning the fundamentals." According to Suzan Jenkins, Senior Vice President of the Institute and Visiting Assistant Professor in Music Industry Studies, this personal exploration is the cornerstone of jazz's foundation. "Traditionally, there has been a loose interpretation of jazz throughout the ages. At the Monk Institute, students can learn from today's jazz masters in the same way that iconic musicians learned from their predecessors. We have legends like Ron Carter and Louis Nash among others. This creative atmosphere promotes the

best possible learning, a hands-on environment that encourages individuality, much like the way jazz was created."

This encouraging environment fosters the creation of many pieces, pieces that are then used to inspire Loyola undergraduates as well as New Orleans public school students. Monk students and Loyola undergraduates can interact through Wednesday "jam sessions" at Tiptina's on 501 Napoleon Avenue. These events, that the club dubs "Club Thelonious," offer other students a chance to learn from these talented Monk individuals, and even express themselves on the "open mic" session. There is also informal interaction around campus, according to Jonathan Bloom, Education Coordinator of the Institute and music educator in New Orleans for twenty-five years. "Our open practices at Loyola give undergraduates an opportunity to learn from our students. I believe most Loyola music students are definitely familiar with our students." Graduate students at Monk also spend time in various educational programs throughout New Orleans public schools. Each of the seven graduates was assigned a school to work with; the students direct vocal, wind, and combo jazz ensembles and septrs in the schools. Some of the schools the graduates work with are McDonogh 35 High School, the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts High, Sophie B. Wright Middle School and Lusher Charter High School.

"This is an important program because as goes the public schools, so goes the city of New Orleans. This initiative encourages young kids to do something positive with themselves; it shows them that it is possible have a successful music career," said Bloom.

The Institute chose New Orleans and Loyola mainly because of New Orleans's reputation as jazz's birthplace, but also because of the welcoming attitude of Loyola's Music Department, and the artistic director's ties to the school and city. "This was the perfect opportunity for the Monk Institute to come to New Orleans, a city credited with the creation of jazz," said Bloom about the Institute's move. "Terence Blanchard, a native New Orleanian, learned about jazz at Loyola. He pushed for this. We couldn't be prouder to on Loyola's campus because the university dedication to Jesuit ideals and service ties into our commitment to New Orleans. We have been received with open arms," Jenkins adds.

The program hopes to leave a lasting impact on its students. Bloom said, "Hopefully students will take away the legacy of the greats after graduation. They can recognize the legends' essences and through this realization, find their own." **W**



Practice at Sophie B. Wright Middle School