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## **Longfellow Middle School Hosts the Fred Smith Jazz Ensemble**

*By Deena Parham*

The Fred Smith Jazz Ensemble recently made a special appearance, at Longfellow Middle School. The jazz and education program was part of the celebrated Triple Hill Music Festival, a project of the Westchester Arts Council.

More than 50 students gathered, in the school's band room, for a concert, and lecture featuring Fred Smith, a renowned trumpeter, and jazz historian. The accomplished and highly respected musicians, Tom Cole (keyboards), Bill Crow (bass), and Tootsie Bean (drums), accompanied him, as members of the 10-year-old Fred Smith Jazz Ensemble.

Prior to the 45-minute set, which was interspersed with a lecture about jazz history, students had an opportunity to meet the musicians. The jazz veterans gave the fledgling musicians a moment to practice the drums, play the keyboards, and blow on the trumpet. The ensemble members also answered questions, and offered pointers about form and technique.

Smith, a former Mount Vernon resident, noted the beauty of the new school building, and the value of education. He told the students, "School will help you to be prepared to move on with your lives, and accomplish whatever you want. You are limited only by the stretch of your imagination."

For many years, Smith has promoted jazz history in schools throughout the country. Initially, Smith said he was hesitant to go into the classroom, after a friend suggested he share his music expertise with young people. Once there, he quickly realized that the students not only responded to him, but the teachers did as well. Smith said, "I am here to support exactly what the teachers are saying to the students. School is where you come to learn, and get the answers."

Smith had an in-depth discussion of the cultural contributions that Africans, and Europeans, made to American music. He explained that the unique collaboration of West African syncopation, combined with European harmony, eventually created an original form of American music called jazz.

The ensemble proceeded to play the jazz standard, "When the Saints Go Marching In." Students watched as Smith put down his trumpet temporarily, and to their surprise, began to sing. He also demonstrated the "call and response technique" used by the late jazz singer and bandleader, Cab Calloway. Students joined Smith in a boisterous chorus of "hey, hey, hey."

Smith noted American music's geographic roots, and talked about the importance of Kansas City, Missouri. "They played the blues faster, and it became rhythm and blues. They gave us jump jazz, and rock 'n' roll. You were expected to express yourself." The ensemble proceeded to play the rhythm and blues hit, "Going to Kansas City."

With a nod to local history, Smith named the legendary jazz nightspots

that were located in New York such as Roseland, the Cotton Club, and the Glen Island Casino. Smith also included two songs from the Great American Songbook, a series of jazz standards that emerged from the 1920's to the 1960's. He amazed the audience when he played two trumpets simultaneously to perform composer Billy Strayhorn's "Satin Doll." Smith dedicated the song, made famous by Duke Ellington, to all of the ladies in the audience. The ensemble concluded with the Alan Brandt and Bob Haymes classic, "That's All."

Following the wonderful performance, Smith remained to converse with a smaller group of music students during a 45-minute master class. Smith spoke candidly, about how his mastery of the trumpet, allowed him to escape poverty, and perform internationally. He credited his success to avoiding drugs, surrounding himself with talented musicians, and having unyielding discipline.

Kelly Oram, the Band Director at Longfellow, was pleased that the Fred Smith Jazz Ensemble visited the school. Oram stated, "It was a great thing. Kids don't often get to hear music like this, even at home. It connects on every level. They can see, and hear it, and realize how different it sounds live."

Donna Jackson, the festival's Creative Director said, "It is important to bring in veteran musicians. It is a sign of respect, of how much they have to teach us. It is in keeping with the African griot tradition of spoken word. It was an honor to have Fred Smith, and his ensemble here to share their stories."



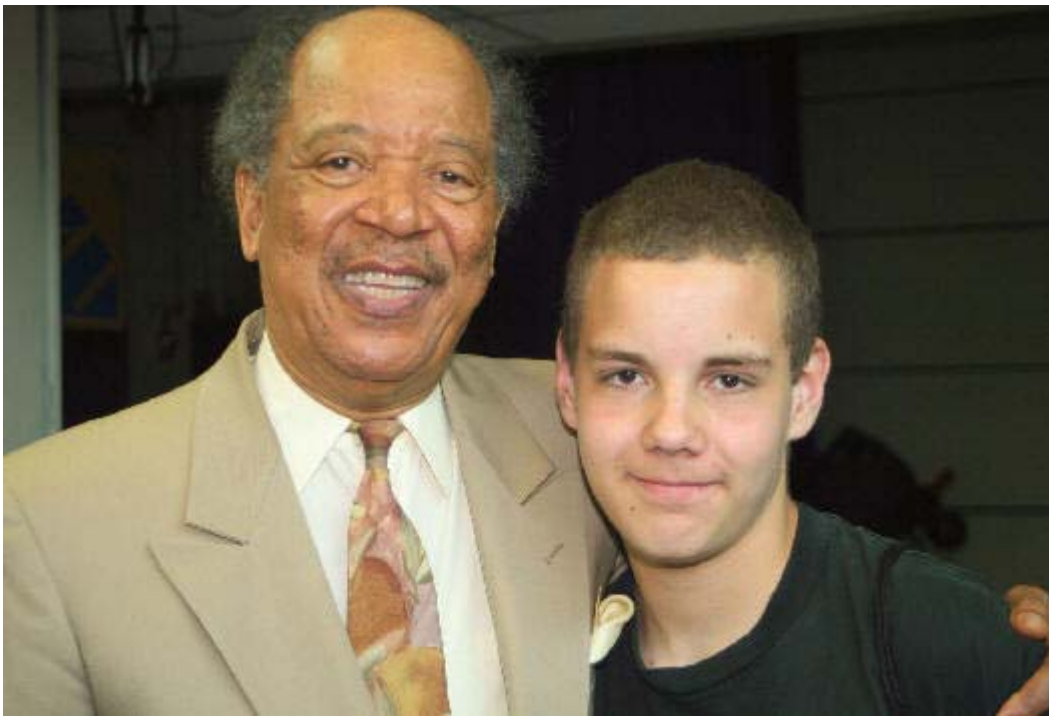
*Fred Smith playing two trumpets*



*Donna Jackson and Fred Smith*



*(l to r) Kelly Oram, Longfellow MS Principal Cleveland Person and Fred Smith*



*Fred Smith with an aspiring Longfellow Middle School musician*



*Longfellow student gets advice from drummer, Tootsie Bean*