

**Legal Name**

The National Jazz Museum In Harlem

**Project Title**

To explore new approaches to building demand for jazz

**DDCF Grant Number**

2013226

**Project Progress and Successes**

With support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the National Jazz Museum in Harlem launched a project to build demand for jazz in partnership with jazz pianist Jonathan Batiste and the nonprofit Maysles Documentary Center, the only independent film house north of Lincoln Center in Manhattan.

At first, the Museum intended to create a public program with the Maysles Center to bring in a multi-generational audience for events hosted by Jon Batiste, using a multimedia and interactive program. The audience would then be invited to bring their friends, family members and peers to join in, with the only common denominator being a curiosity about jazz. After lengthy discussions with Batiste and our team, we decided that a short film about the process would be invaluable in creating outposts for the Museum and the Maysles Center around the country.

Throughout the grant period, we also offered a semi-monthly film series at the Maysles Center, the audience for which was predominantly senior citizens.

Jon Batiste met with the renowned filmmaker and Maysles Center founder Albert Maysles about the concept, and not only did Maysles endorse it, he offered to film the event himself. Through the Maysles Center, we met the extraordinary filmmaker Andre Robert Lee, who served as the director of our film. Lee received critical acclaim for his 2012 film *The Prep School Negro*, which chronicles his experience as a scholarship student attending one of Philadelphia's most prestigious private schools. The Museum plans to continue working with Lee to make a full-length film that will be used to build jazz audiences in Harlem and across the U.S.

A select group of students with whom the Museum and the Maysles Center had relationships were used to reach out to the target audience. In addition, a multi-generational group of volunteers was selected to serve as part of the filmmaking crew. This widened the group of participants.

The film, titled *Harmony in Harlem*, after a Duke Ellington composition, shows a session with young people who had never met and who coalesced around Batiste and jazz to form a community. The students shown in the film came from distinctly different backgrounds, some with a strong foundation in music, and others with little to no arts background. Batiste encouraged them to gather around the piano and eventually coaxed them into

creating a tune. What was amazing was how eager the non-musicians were to participate. This was an eye-opening experience for them.

The next step was a long session in which the students created their own version of an epic poem, with the common denominator being their knowledge of hip-hop. The students shared profound and personal experiences through the medium of jazz. They had their own epiphanies and were united by a great desire to return and build on what they had shared as a group. Batiste assembled a diverse group of young professionals to interact with the students. There was a tap dancer, a female Korean-American saxophonist, a tuba player from Africa, a jazz drummer, and an outstanding 11-year-old guitarist who hit it off with 88-year-old Albert Maysles.

The event was filmed at the Museum in early December 2014. The making of the film itself became a paradigm of jazz, creating a universe that spanned many decades. It focused on the multilayered potential of jazz to serve as an educational tool and, at the same time, expand the influence and range of the partner institutions. Shortly after the filming was complete, Mr. Maysles passed away. The Museum was honored to work with this groundbreaking filmmaker, who, along with his brother, was the first to make nonfiction feature films some 50 years ago.

### **Challenges / Obstacles / Failures Encountered in the Project**

Two of the biggest challenges revolved around scheduling. Jon Batiste is regularly on the road, traveling internationally. Nonetheless, we carved out the requisite time during his New York stints. Weather intruded on our initial plan to make the film at the Maysles Center, where the musicians were to arrive after a New Orleans-style parade departing from the Museum. There was a snowstorm that weekend, and director Andre Robert Lee determined he would not be able to get the shots he needed for the video. Additionally, we were concerned that some of our student musicians would not be able to attend. The date was rescheduled for the following month, and by then it was too late in the season for the parade. The upside was that we were able to use the Museum as the venue. Another challenge was securing the number of students and seniors needed to participate; so many things complicate the students' schedules while school is in session, and many of the seniors have health issues.

### **What was learned from these that might be of benefit to others?**

The Museum learned that it would be better to tie students' participation to their school and their grades, by having teachers incorporate the program into their curriculum. Additionally, we could have had a larger audience if we had scheduled the event at a community or senior center. The challenge was that there were a limited number of venues that provided the kind of lighting needed for the video. The program might have experienced greater success in more remote locations, where there would be less competition for the participants' time. We also could make a bigger impact in those areas that have limited arts options and where there is a greater need for intergenerational programs. Both the Maysles Center and the Museum would engender a greater sense of loyalty from these audiences as well, furthering establishing vital and sustainable links. Going forward, we plan to promote the film as a program done in Harlem that can be exported to other underserved communities.

**Links to relevant website(s) and/or project publications, reports, etc.**

The film can be viewed here:

<https://vimeo.com/126572494>

**If someone wishes to speak with your organization further about your project, would there be a willing contact? Y/N**

If yes, please provide contact name and information for preferred method of contact (email, phone, etc).

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