

MUSIC & NIGHTLIFE    MAY 30, 2016 9:10 PM

# New World's jazz band hits all the right notes

## HIGHLIGHTS

The band won top honors at the 2016 Essentially Ellington competition

Bested 112 high school bands across the country

Took home awards for Outstanding Rhythm, Saxophone and Trombone sections



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Earlier this year, the high school jazz band at Miami's New World School of the Arts recorded a performance of three musical arrangements by jazz legend Duke Ellington.

They submitted their routine to Jazz at Lincoln Center, hoping to be selected to perform at the 2016 *Essentially Ellington* High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival in New York, one of the most prestigious high school jazz events in the country. Jazz giants Wynton Marsalis, Chris Crenshaw and others serve as judges.

The New World band not only was picked to perform — out of 112 bands nationwide — but it came in first place, something it had not done since 2005.

“We heard the recordings and that’s when we were like, ‘Oh wow, this is good,’” said Joseph Miller, 17, who plays alto saxophone for the band. “That’s when we knew we really had a chance.”

By placing in the top three, the band played as part of the festival following the competition. In addition to being named the top band, the band also took home awards for Outstanding Rhythm Section, Outstanding Saxophone Section and Outstanding Trombone Section.

Many, too, were recognized for individual awards:

Roberto Acosta was recognized for Outstanding Piano. Kebra Seyoun-Charles won for Outstanding Walking Bass. Victor Valdes was given honors for Outstanding Drums. Tyler Goodman was noted for Outstanding Clarinet. Abdias Armenteros was named Outstanding Tenor Saxophone. Jasmine Moody was awarded Outstanding Vocals. New World instructor and band director Jim Gaisor was awarded Most Original & Consistently Original Directing Style.

“This is my 17<sup>th</sup> year teaching here. I believe strongly in the expression – and my students know it – ‘Trust the process,’” said Gaisor, 44. “For example, the rhythm section was all seniors. I look at this first-place win as though it took four years to do this. It’s about trusting the rehearsal process every day.”

Instead of making the “touristy” stops during their down time in New York, the band went to the Village Vanguard – the legendary jazz club in Greenwich Village.

“We didn’t realize how huge it was. It was on the news. It was in newspapers. We realized that this thing was bigger than any of us,” said Joseph. “It just showed me that the world is open.”

Joseph and trombonist Luis Nuñez are juniors at New World. Both estimate they spend close to 40 hours every week practicing music — including the three hours a day they practice music at school.

Their practice time does not take into account the hours spent studying and doing homework to keep up with the rigors of their academics. They are both A students.

Luis, 17, lives in the Hammocks area. He wakes up at 5 a.m. to get to school. He takes a bus to the Metrorail station, a Metrorail train to downtown, then a Metromover to New World. His commute takes him several hours every day and he will often spend more than 12 hours a day outside of the home. Once he gets home, he catches up on schoolwork – as well as practicing music.

He said the last time he hung out with his friends was to see *Deadpool* when it was in theaters more than three months ago.

“I typically go and listen to a recording of myself from a year ago and I go, ‘There’s been progress, why stop now?’” he said.

That’s where Gaisor says that his “trust the process” philosophy comes into play.

“That’s the challenge. They make big sacrifices,” Gaisor said. “Nobody’s going to know if you went home tonight and practiced for an hour and a half... It’s about stacking an hour and a half, and another, and another, and another — and then all of a sudden you’re developing.”

Both got into music through their families. Luis was inspired to pursue music after he saw his older brother play music during his time at Felix Varela Senior High. Joseph’s father, Ricky Miller, was a pianist.

A Liberty City native, Joseph originally found his love for music through his father, but also credits his church for nurturing that interest. He is a member of New Birth Baptist Church, where he is part of the band. In addition to the saxophone, he plays the piano, the organ

and the drums.

When asked about what his plans are after New World, Joseph asked whether he should give his “two-year plan” or his “five-year plan.”

He hopes to translate his musical talents into a scholarship at a top music school – perhaps The New School in New York or Berklee College of Music in Boston. While he wants to be a professional musician, he also says that he’s interested in teaching music one day, following his mother’s lead – a Miami-Dade County Public Schools teacher.

“It does get tiring, but from my standpoint, eventually it pays off in the end,” he said.

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## WATCH ONLINE

To see the band's award-winning performance, you can go to [livestream.com/jazz/CompetitionPartI](http://livestream.com/jazz/CompetitionPartI) and fast forward to the 2 hour, 56 minute mark.



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