

## NEWS

### Watch President Obama Celebrate International Jazz Day With an All-Star Concert April 30 on ABC



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

Herbie Hancock plays to high school students from across the Washington D.C. area in State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, D.C. on, April 29, 2016 as part of the International Jazz Day celebration.

"Not a bad venue, right?" asks UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, chairman of International Jazz Day, and living jazz legend [Herbie Hancock](#) jokingly, after mention of what's sure to be the genre's biggest event of the year: an all-star jazz concert, broadcast from the South Lawn of the White House in primetime on ABC (April 30, 8 p.m. ET/7 p.m. CT).

## [President Obama to Host International Jazz Day Concert at White House](#)

Jazz has been at the White House almost as long as it's existed -- though what Ray Miller and his band were playing for Calvin Coolidge in 1924 likely bears little resemblance to the music President and Mrs. Obama will be listening to as they celebrate International Jazz Day (also April 30), the impetus for the concert and broadcast. 2016's concert will feature a wide range of artists including [Wayne Shorter](#), [Aretha Franklin](#), [Sting](#), [Esperanza Spalding](#), [Robert Glasper](#), [Chick Corea](#), and Hancock himself, among dozens of others.

"When it was presented to the President and Mrs. Obama, they immediately embraced the idea of doing this at the White House," says Tom Carter, President of the Thelonious Monk Institute (the organization that runs International Jazz Day, now in its fifth year), adding, "Jazz has been a very important part of both of their lives.

"The President will tell you about his teens, when he started listening to [Miles Davis](#) and [Herbie Hancock](#) and [Wayne Shorter](#) and others, and how jazz has been an integral part of his life," says Carter, "and the First Lady will tell you about her grandfather's passion for jazz, and how he exposed her as a child to this music. They've both been surrounded by jazz for most of their lives, so they jumped at the opportunity to have their friends and the artists that they follow to the White House."

Hancock's already been a part of Obama's presidency, though, as well as almost every president since Carter, who famously had his own South Lawn jazz celebration in 1978, organized by Newport Jazz Festival impresario George Wein. In fact, he's performed there so often, he's lost count: a Valentine's Day celebration during the second Bush administration, at the invitation of First Lady Laura, President Obama's 50th birthday, a recent state dinner where he did a duet with classical virtuoso Lang Lang..."I've seen a range of presidents," he concludes. The pianist has even been enlisted on the campaign trail. "When Clinton was running for president for the first time," he says, "he asked me and Wayne Shorter -- was Ron Carter there too? -- to fly in to Little Rock [an ensemble

that would have included all the living members of Miles Davis's famous Second Great Quintet]. He actually flew us there on a private plane -- he really wanted us there. It was really cool."

The reason he's been called up so often is because jazz is, as he puts it, "America's classical music these days." With a primetime slot, though, the International Jazz Day organizers want to show that it's anything but stodgy. "I think it's an opportunity for those who know the word jazz, and have maybe some conception of what they believe jazz is, to watch it on this stage and to hear incredible jazz artists from around the world," adds Carter. "A lot of people have thought of this as a music of the past, but it really is living."

Showing the vibrancy of jazz culture is one of the primary missions of International Jazz Day, which in its short life has already swelled into events in 190 countries (including "two stations down in Antarctica, McMurdo and Palmer," he says, "and all 50 states") annually on April 30th, with a special emphasis on each year's host city. "What better place to have it than to come back to America," says Carter of this year's host, "and to have it at the White House" (full listings of International Jazz Day events are available [on their site](#)).

"Jazz is about coming in with an open mind," adds John Beasley, the all-star concert's musical director, of what makes the international festival special. "Getting these people from all over the world to come and play together. It gives hope that someday we really can resolve our differences. It's not just about soloing -- it's about the support underneath the soloists."

"Part of its character is that it borrows from any genre or culture that touches it, and it also lends itself to any genre or culture that touches it," adds Hancock. "I think that's what has kept it alive over the decades." Showing that evolution at the White House, to those in charge at International Jazz Day, is just proof that it's not going anywhere. "I think," concludes Carter, "that it's an evening people will be talking about for many years to come."