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Jazz Day at home: Virtual concert brings music, hope amid coronavirus

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By Wu Yan

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The annual International Jazz Day global concert was held online for the first time on Thursday due to the coronavirus pandemic, with a lineup of A-list musicians, including Marcus Miller and Lang Lang, performing.

Instead of taking place as previously planned in Cape Town, South Africa, the concert featured performances and special messages recorded from the homes of artists, as well as highlights from the previous eight annual concerts held around the world.

Grammy Award-winning bassist and composer Marcus Miller sent messages from his home studio in Los Angeles, U.S.: "In these crazy times, music really has the ability to unite people, connect people, comfort people and provide inspiration and hope."

"I would like to dedicate this piece to all the families whose lives have been impacted by the pandemic, and also to all the first responders, the health workers, doctors and nurses. Thank you so much," said Miller before he played a lively music piece to wish a happy International Jazz Day.



Pianist Lang Lang rehearses by himself after practicing with chief conductor Charles Dutoit and the Philadelphia Orchestra, in Philadelphia, U.S., October 19, 2011. /AP

On the other side of the Pacific, Chinese pianist Lang Lang in Shanghai played a portion of "Rhapsody in Blue," on which he and concert host and pianist Herbie Hancock had collaborated many times before.

"We really need to unite as one, especially in this very difficult time, which I believe jazz music and music in general will heal people's heart," said Lang.

During the virtual concert, host Hancock, who is also the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue and Co-Chair of International Jazz Day, paid tribute to "our most beloved and gifted jazz artists" whose lives were taken by coronavirus, including Afro-jazz legend Manu Dibango, saxophonist Lee Konitz, pianist and educator Ellis Marsalis Jr., guitarist Bucky Pizzarelli, trumpeter Wallace Roney and others.



A file photo of Herbie Hancock. /AP

South Africa's "first lady of song" Sibongile Khumalo in Johannesburg presented a poem, titled "Warriors for Peace," based on the lyrics of an old song of her:

"We are fearless

We are warriors for peace

We are fearless

We embrace the gift of healing with our hearts and our minds

We will gather to share one love and one rhythm"

To show solidarity with everyone affected by the pandemic, other artists participated in the concert include Dee Dee Bridgewater, John McLaughlin, John Scofield, Cécile McLorin Salvant, A Bu and Youn Sun Nah.



Jazz singer Dee Dee Bridgewater performs in Paris, France, April 30, 2015. /AP

Hancock also shared his hope at the end of the concert: "Worldwide peaceful coexistence is not just wishful thinking but a bonafide reality."

The International Jazz Day, which falls on April 30, was initially established in 2011 by Hancock to celebrate jazz and highlight the music's important role in encouraging dialogue, combating discrimination and promoting human dignity.

Besides the all-star virtual global concert, the celebration also featured a series of free educational masterclasses and panel discussions online led by some of the world's renowned jazz musicians.