

Obama to host International Jazz Day concert at White House

DARLENE SUPERVILLE March 30, 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) — International Jazz Day, one of the world's biggest celebrations of jazz, is coming to the White House.

President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle, plan to host a blockbuster concert April 29 featuring Aretha Franklin, Al Jarreau, Sting, Herbie Hancock and many other established and up-and-coming musical artists. The show is to be televised by ABC the following day, on April 30 — the fifth anniversary of International Jazz Day.

Scores of musical performances and educational and community service programs are also planned for across the District of Columbia, in all 50 states and 196 UNESCO and United Nations member countries, said Tom Carter, president of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. The jazz institute and UNESCO sponsor International Jazz Day. It was established to highlight jazz music as a unifying force for freedom and creativity.

The District of Columbia is where the famous jazz pianist and bandleader Duke Ellington was born, on April 29. The city is also known for its thriving jazz scene.

Previous host cities for International Jazz Day were Istanbul, Turkey, in 2013; Osaka, Japan, in 2014; and Paris in 2015.

In 2012, programs were held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris; in New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz; and at the U.N. General Assembly Hall in New York City.

“Jazz has been a uniting force and very unifying for people all over the world for the last century,” Carter told The Associated Press by telephone ahead of Wednesday's official announcement of International Jazz Day. “It is the voice for many of those facing challenges around the world.”

Last year's programming reached more than 2.8 billion people, he said.

Hancock, a UNESCO goodwill ambassador whose idea led to the creation of International Jazz Day, said jazz is a musical language that is understood worldwide.

An award-winning pianist and bandleader, Hancock said that, in the past, anyone who wanted to learn jazz had to travel to America. But “incredible” jazz musicians are now everywhere, he said.

“That really shows me the power of the music and the fact that it has reached every country on the planet,” Hancock told the AP in a telephone interview.

Obama and the first lady are big music lovers and supporters of jazz. During a recent appearance at the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas, Mrs. Obama said one of her grandfathers loved and

collected jazz and that she would visit him on Saturdays while growing up in Chicago “and I would just play music with him.”

The Obamas practically jumped at the chance to bring the International Jazz Day concert to the White House, Carter said.

“They welcomed us with open arms,” added Hancock.