

LICM celebrates MLK day with a Louis Armstrong tribute from Jazz at Lincoln Center

By REI WOLFSOHN

Correspondent

For Martin Luther King Day weekend, the Long Island Children's Museum celebrated the life and music of Louis Armstrong by hosting Jazz at Lincoln Center through its partnership with the Tilles Center.

This six-musician band included Summer Camargo on trumpet, Dave Drake on piano, Charles Turner on vocals, Brandi Disterheft on bass, David Hawkins on drums and Justin Poindexter on guitar. Turner gently and slowly told the story of the Great Migration throughout the concert, involving the children in each song in some way.

"You see how when we're playing with one another, no one is playing over another person," Turner said. "There's constant communication and care. Everyone gets to shine in that music democracy, where you can have your moment but you always come back to the collective. That's what Louis Armstrong represents as well — freedom and democracy, and understanding that freedom does come with some kind of structure."

The band started with "On the Sunny Side of the Street." Then, Turner asked the children to share about someone in their family who migrated to America. He explained that the Great Migration was a moment in history when nine million African-Americans moved from the South to the North and West.

Turner spoke to the kids about how Armstrong moved from New Orleans to Chicago and followed that with "Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?"

"MLK day is a great day to celebrate one of the great American heroes who was active in bringing people together, and seeing that we're all the same," Erika Floreska, president of the Long Island Children's Museum, said. "The more we can work together and come together and play together, the better off we're gonna be. That's what we try to do together here every day. But definitely on MLK day we want to celebrate that and do something. It's not a day to have off, it's a day to have on."

For the next song, Turner asked the children to come up with a feeling that each musician would express during their solo. They chose anxious, tranquil, mad, happy and nervous. For this, the band played "Blue Skies."

It was around this time that Stephen Bronner's two daughters started to get "jittery."

"One of my two girls might be talking about it in a few days, and going, 'Oh, can we listen to that song again?'" he said.

After sharing an anecdote about Armstrong's lover telling him to start his own band, leading him to moved to New York City, Turner explained what a solo is. He invited any kids who wanted to be on stage to dance together and take turns doing a solo dance. The song they danced to was



Rei Wolfsohn/Herald photos

Kids got up on stage to dance with the band at the Long Island Children's Museum's Jazz at Lincoln Center concert on Jan. 19.

"Stompin' at the Savoy."

Before the second-to-last song, Turner asked all the kids in the audience to show him their smiles. Then the band played "When You're Smiling."

"Wow, where do I start?" Hayden Alexis, father of two, said. "It was amazing. The family interaction, it was a lesson, more than just a show."

Before the last song, the band held a question and answer session for the audience. The children asked questions about the band member's favorite kinds of music, favorite kinds of food and favorite beats to dance to. The show ended with Armstrong's most famous song, "What A Wonderful World."

"It was so, so wonderful," Turner said. "Such a wonderful way to spend this weekend. Celebrating music with the kids, watching them dance and interact with the music, hearing about what their migration stories are... We said, 'Can we just see your smile?' And just seeing the light of children and their sincerity and their joy, it's just such a joy to be around.

"And it just feeds us to do better as people, as musicians," he added. "So it's just such a blessing to be able to share music with these kids today."



LICM's Jazz at Lincoln Center celebrated Louis Armstrong for MLK weekend.