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Legend's son has the prescription for jazz

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T.S. Monk is well-positioned to know what is wrong with the jazz industry.

He grew up in the "golden age" of jazz as the son of pianist/composer/legend Thelonious Monk.

He helped found the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, which celebrates his late father's music and runs an annual competition for the best in young jazz players.

He is an active jazz drummer and band leader.

And he jumps at the chance to explain what is wrong: The industry's relationship to the consumer is skewed.

Jazz has lost its connection to the entertainment industry and has to get it back, the 53-year-old musician said in a telephone interview last week from his New Jersey home.

The musical side of jazz, on the other hand, has never been healthier, he said.

Winnipeg jazz fans can hear for themselves on Sunday when the T.S. Monk Sextet performs two shows, 1 p.m. and 8 p.m., at the Berney Theatre as part of the **Asper Foundation Jazz Performances** series. Tickets are available at Ticketmaster, 780-3333.

Monk began performing with his father, played R&B for years, took some time away from music, and then returned to jazz. He says he has mixed all those experiences into his music, which he describes as 'Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers meet Blood, Sweat and Tears.'

"I couldn't play it safe," he said. "My father wouldn't stand it."

Monk points to older jazz fans on one hand, and bright, young high-school musicians on the other, as a sign jazz is alive and well, despite its slipping commercial status.

He credits the educational efforts of trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and the Monk Institute for generating such an interest among teens. "Wynton was an aberration 25 years ago," Monk said, "as a young guy who could play as well as he did. But there are lots of them, now."

The jazz industry -- the record companies and clubs -- have to re-establish a connection with an audience that has many choices when it comes to spending its entertainment dollars, Monk said.

"We are not consumer friendly. We want to seem serious, geniuses... and tell the consumer to give us his money. We're not sexy and controversial; we're musically talented and that's not enough."

Record companies have to market CDs and the musicians who make them, Monk said. To put out a disc and run an ad in Downbeat magazine is not marketing, he added. "Marketing is when you develop an artist like my father or Miles Davis," develop the demographics of the artist's audience and then target the audience.

The baby-boom generation, of which he is a member, is "out of sorts," Monk said. "They like Trane and Kenny G" and form a middle ground that is the biggest jazz audience.

That's how Norah Jones, the singer who won six Grammys, ended up on the legendary jazz label Blue Note. "Her music is in between -- people like good music, but they want it modern."

The Young Women of Note Jazz Competition 2003, designed to encourage young female jazz musicians to pursue their potential while they receive support, guidance and mentorship from established jazz musicians, is looking for applicants.

The competition, in its second year, is sponsored by the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra and the Jazz Winnipeg Festival.

Participants must be Manitoba residents in Grade 7 to Senior 4, either vocalists or instrumentalists. Adjudicators will assess recorded auditions and recommend candidates for the finals on April 9. The winner will perform with the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra on April 23 at Pantages Playhouse Theatre and at a performance during the Jazz Winnipeg Festival.

Application forms are available at Long and McQuade, Mother's Music, Second Encore, the Manitoba Conservatory of Music and Art, Croft Music, and JJH McLean. For more information, call 989-4654 or 661-4834, or e-mail info@classactmusic.com or visit www.jazzwinnipeg.com. Submissions must be received on or before March 14.

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