

2025-2026 Impact *Report*

giving more kids a place *to play*

This year, Cincinnati Jazz Academy students took jazz beyond the classroom. They performed on some of Cincinnati's most celebrated stages, traveled internationally, worked alongside professional musicians, and stepped into opportunities that challenged them to grow. Behind every performance was a year of practice, mentorship, and collaboration, made possible through access to an exceptional music education that would otherwise be out of reach for many students.



"I didn't want to improvise on stage at the Aronoff, but after doing that, reading a passage in class is a piece of cake."

– Jazz Academy Student



the year *in review*

2025–2026 was a year of growth, new opportunities, and music that took our students far beyond the classroom.

This year, the Cincinnati Jazz Academy provided 107 diverse youth with a barrier-free, high-quality jazz education, and the opportunity to discover what's possible.

This year also marked a milestone: the Academy celebrated its first graduates, including three students who have been with CJA since 4th grade.

107

students served
in grades 4 –12

82%

demonstrated increased
musical proficiency

93%

gained stronger
collaboration & teamwork

100%

free music education for
underserved students

The Academy provides students with everything they need to succeed—including bus transportation, meals, instruments, ensemble instruction, and weekly private lessons—all at no cost. Students build their musical skills while developing confidence, creativity, and teamwork, culminating in extraordinary performance opportunities.



jazz goes *global*

32 Cincinnati students. 11 youth ensembles from around the world. One unforgettable trip.

In June 2025, the Cincinnati Jazz Academy (CJA) traveled to Portugal to perform at the prestigious Lisbon International Youth Music Festival, becoming the first high school jazz group from Ohio to perform at the festival.

Made up of 32 Cincinnati Public Schools students in grades 8–12, the CJA orchestra performed in UNESCO World Heritage sites in Lisbon and Batalha, including the Ruínas do Carmo and Mosteiro da Batalha. The tour culminated in a performance with Portuguese students at the Academia de Música de Lisboa, marking the first student jazz performance and jam session at the academy.

For the students, the experience was more than a chance to perform abroad. It was an opportunity to see new places, connect through music, and experience the world beyond Cincinnati.

meet the *team*



Ralph DiSylvestro
Artistic Director
ralphdisylvestro@kennedyarts.org

Following the retirement of CJA founder Dr. Isidore Rudnick, we welcomed a new Artistic Director: jazz trumpeter and educator Ralph DiSylvestro. Originally from Philadelphia, Ralph brings more than 25 years of experience as both a working musician and teacher.

After studying with renowned trumpeter Terell Stafford at Temple University and earning his master's degree from Northern Illinois University, Ralph went on to perform and tour nationally and internationally. He has focused on a teaching career since 1988 and is a professor of jazz at Xavier University.

We're excited to partner with Ralph to shape what's next for the Jazz Academy.



Brandon Graves
Program Manager
brandon@kennedyarts.org

The Cincinnati Jazz Academy also welcomed Brandon Graves as its new Program Manager this year. A music educator, performer, and arts administrator, Brandon brings a passion for creating meaningful, accessible music experiences for young people.

A certified K-12 music teacher, he has built music programs, founded a district-wide middle school honors choir, and was named South Carolina Teacher of the Year in 2021-2022.

With graduate degrees in music education and arts management, Brandon brings both classroom experience and leadership to the Academy.

From Cincinnati to *Carnegie Hall*

How one Jazz Academy student took her talent to the national stage

At just 16, Jazz Academy student Cadence Okuwobi is already making her mark as a jazz bassist. Following a highly competitive national audition, she was selected as the only student from Ohio to participate in Carnegie Hall's prestigious NYO Jazz program, joining 22 young musicians from across the country this summer. The program brought Cadence to New York for intensive rehearsals, masterclasses, and a performance at Carnegie Hall before an international tour through Asia.

Cadence's journey with jazz began in 5th grade when she joined the Cincinnati Jazz Academy and was introduced to the upright bass. Playing in ensembles and combos, she quickly distinguished herself through her exceptional dedication, musicianship, and work ethic.

Cadence's story is a powerful example of what can happen when young musicians have access to high-quality instruction, mentorship, and opportunities to grow.

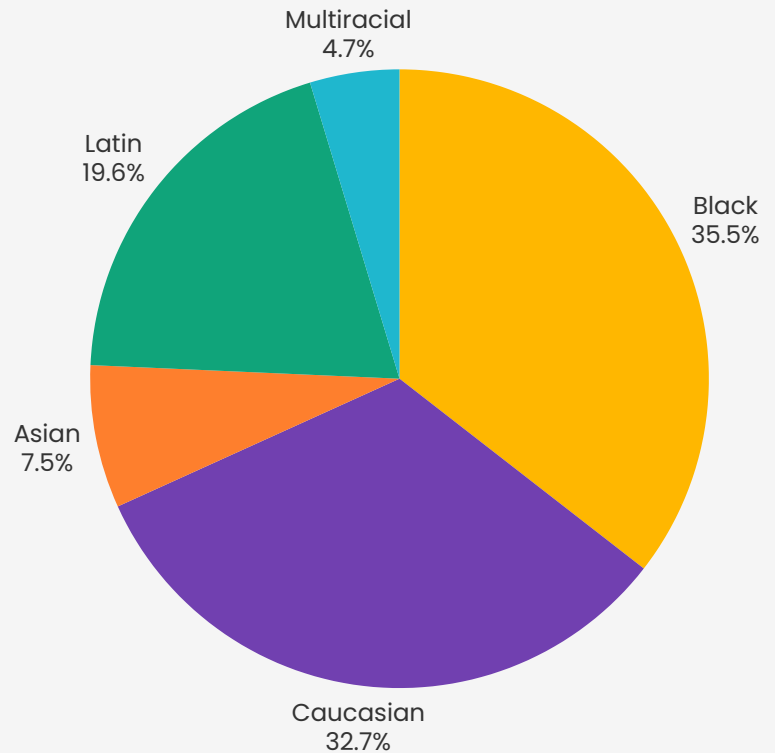


student *impact*

In 2025–2026, the Cincinnati Jazz Academy served 107 students from 24 Cincinnati Public Schools, with a nearly even split of 56 male and 51 female students and representing a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Year-end assessments showed meaningful growth in both musical and personal skills.

- **82%** of students demonstrated proficiency in jazz performance and ensemble skills.
- **93%** of students reported stronger collaboration and teamwork.
- **91%** of families reported seeing growth in their child's confidence, goal-setting, and other personal skills.



sharing the stage

Memorial Hall: Our students performed at a pre-concert reception for acclaimed bassist and composer Christian McBride as part of the Longworth–Anderson Series.

among the best

Essentially Ellington Festival: Three CJA students earned distinguished soloist awards at the Regional Essentially Ellington Festival at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music.

opening night

Cincinnati May Festival: The Cincinnati Jazz Academy performed at Diner et Fleur on opening night for the Cincinnati May Festival.

center stage

CPS International Jazz Festival: The Jazz Academy Orchestras performed on the big stage at the Aronoff Center for the Arts, alongside internationally acclaimed guest artist Robin Eubanks.

your support makes it *possible*

The Cincinnati Jazz Academy is made possible through the generous support of our donors.

Every note a student plays, every solo they find the courage to take, every performance where they stand a little taller, starts with someone believing in them enough to give.

\$1,500 sponsors one student for a full year—covering transportation, an instrument, instruction, and performance opportunities that open doors far beyond the stage.

Will you help a student take the stage?

Gifts of every size make a difference.
Click here or scan QR code to give today.



2025-2026 FUNDERS

- Albert Harris
- KidFuture CPS
- Louise Dieterle Nippert Musical Arts Fund of the Greenacres Foundation
- Manuel D. and Rhoda Mayerson Foundation
- National Endowment for the Arts
- H.B., E.W. & F.R. Luther Charitable Foundation
- Alvin H. Crawford Fund of Greater Cincinnati Foundation

PARTNER: Cincinnati Public Schools

OPERATING SUPPORT FUNDERS

