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On Q (exclusive interviews)



Q&A with Howard Sandifer



Howard Sandifer

By Clarence Waldon

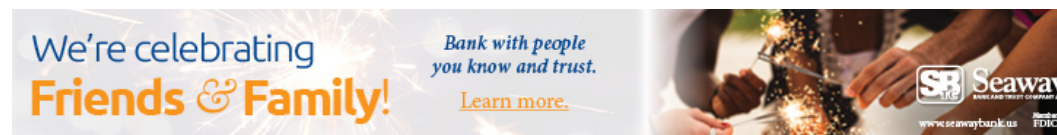
A soulful symphony can be heard on the West Side of Chicago. And Howard Sandifer is conducting it.

Thanks to Sandifer, the founder of the Chicago West Community Music Center (CWCMC), there are more and more teens picking up instruments, instead of guns on the city's West Side. Something that you don't see on the evening news.

Started in 1999, the school introduces students from elementary school through high school to all musical styles from jazz to classical to Brazilian to hip-hop, pop and R&B. They also learn everything about the music business including songwriting, producing, arranging, recording and publishing.

A native of Chicago, he is a graduate of Roosevelt University where he majored in music education and minored in piano. A staff writer of Curtis Mayfield's record label, Curtom, he wrote the hit, "It Only Hurts For A Little While" for the Notations. He also composed the theme song for the "Ebony/Jet Showcase," presented by Johnson Publishing Company.

N'digo caught up with the Chicago music man to discuss the center, the students and all that jazz .





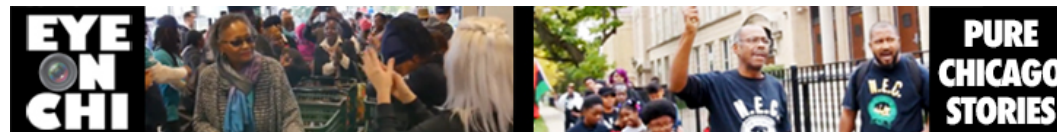
Chicago West Community Music Center.

What inspired you to start the Chicago West Community Music Center?

The lack of high quality music in the schools is the first reason my wife, Darlene, and I started the Chicago West Community Music Center. In 1979, they took music and the arts out of the schools. We felt we had to do something ourselves. Eleanor Roosevelt once said "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness." So we did outreach in the schools. They took music out, we brought it back, We also realized that a lot of kids had an opportunity to get into trouble if they don't have anything positive to do. We know there are studies that say kids get into the most trouble, like joining gangs, between 3 and 6 p.m.. We serve the Austin, North Lawndale, East and West Garfield Park communities, the violence here is off the charts. We give the students an alternative to the crime- ridden life. The students can come to the center, meet friends and study music. There is nothing like it.

You took your high school students to Paris last year. What was that experience like?

It was a life-changing experience. Many of the students had not been out of the West Side community or on a plane before. They go to school and church in the community and that is it. Going to Europe was a remarkable experience, not just the journey there, but the culture they found upon arrival. People are more alike than they are different, Maya Angelou once said .People all over the world are basically the same, they share the same desires, same fears and same concerns. People want to make a living and take care of themselves. People want to live in peace without being hurt. The students even composed a song about their first time in Paris that they sang at one of our performances.



Let's talk about the late, great Herb Kent. You appeared on his "Battle of the Best" show in June. What was that like?

It was an honor to be able to meet Herb Kent. His knowledge of music was legendary. I grew up listening to him. The records he played were the soundtrack of our lives. He will be missed. There will be no one to

take his place. I went toe-to-toe with the legendary Herb Kent on the Battle of the Best. Wow! What a great moment. What a great guy.



You are a sought-after pianist. What drew you to the piano?

I wanted to be like my older brother and sister. I wanted to imitate them when I was 4 or 5. My mother would take me to their lessons. I had a very good ear and played quite well. It is a blessing to be able to share the gift of music. My siblings did not stick with it when they got older.

What are some of the Center's recent performances?

Just this past Friday, the students performed Christmas carols at the Christmas Tree Lighting at the Wrigley Building. They sang everything from "Deck The Hall," "Jingle Bells" and Donny Hathaway's "This Christmas." We also did the Night in the Parks concert series this summer. We paid tribute to the producers and songwriters Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff with "The Sound of Philadelphia" tribute. We want people to see the great music on the West Side. We did tributes to Nancy Wilson, Aretha Franklin, Ella Fitzgerald

and Lou Rawls. We had a great evening with "Paris Noir," a salute to the African- American artists who found success in Paris: Eartha Kitt, Bricktop, Josephine Baker and Nina Simone. That should go out on tour. More people need to see and enjoy It was marvelous, I must say.



Chicago West Community Music Center students

Who is on your playlist?

John Coltrane, the superb 2016 six-disc "John Coltrane" box set, the Atlantic Years; classical pianist Lara Downes, Janelle Monae, John Legend and Solange.

Who influenced your music as a child?

Growing up it was Nat King Cole, a remarkable musician, singer and pianist. Ray Bryant, cool piano player and Valerie Simpson of Ashford and Simpson fame. I love how she plays the piano!

Name the five albums you must have if you were on a desert island.

"John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman," one of the greatest sax players of all time and one of the greatest voices of all time, together! "My One and Only Love" one of the most beautiful songs ever written. 2. The Temptations Greatest Hits, the original singers. 3. Isaac Hayes, "Hot-Buttered Soul," with a 15-minute song that was unheard of back then. He was remarkable, I remember seeing him at the Auditorium when I was in Farragut High School. He was a genius, 4. Sir Georg Solti "Beethoven Symphonies" with Chicago Symphony Orchestra. I love the symphony. 5. "Oh Happy Day" by the Edwin Hawkins Singers. It was everything. It was like a samba and had these incredible jazz chords and straight up gospel!

Tell us some of the dates coming up during the holiday season.

Some of the dates coming up for the high school students include our third appearance at the **McDonald's Thanksgiving Day Parade(November 24)** at

State Street between Wacker Drive and Van Buren and broadcast on WGN, 7 a.m. through 1 p.m.

Here are a few others. Hope the readers will come out and join us.

December 14

Christmas Program
CWCMC String Ensemble w/Harp
2045 N. Lincoln Park West
12 to 2 p.m.

December 17

WISH (String Program)
Christmas Recital
Garfield Park Fieldhouse
300 N. Central Park Avenue
11 am. to 1 pm.

December 23

After School Matters and Chicago West Community Music Center
Choir & Orchestra
Pre-Concert Performance
Symphony Center Rotunda
Symphony Center
220 S. Michigan Ave.
12 pm. to 12:45 p.m.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

No, we covered everything, Please come on and out and join us at any of our performances.



Clarence Waldron is an entertainment music journalist and founder of CW Media public relations and marketing firm. He is the former award-winning senior writer for Jet Magazine and an adjunct professor at Northwestern University.

Calendar

MCDONALD'S® THANKSGIVING PARADE @ State St. from Congress to Randolph

NOV 24 Thu

Nov 24 @ 8:00 am – 9:00 am



Join the fun at McDonald's Thanksgiving Parade! An exciting show of marching bands, gigantic balloons, decorative floats, and lots of entertainment!

McDonald's Thanksgiving Parade.

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November 24, 2016 @ 8:00 am – 9:00 am

WHERE: State St. from Congress to Randolph - Chicago, IL 60602, USA

Visit the Event Calendar at NDIGO.com/calendar



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