

Clark Terry remembered at Southeast as jazz educator

By Kayla Gaffney

Legendary jazz trumpeter Clark Terry died on February 21 at the age of 94.

Although being known for his career as a jazz musician, Terry also had a great passion for jazz education. While still working as a performer, Terry dedicated a lot of his time to teaching young people about jazz at colleges and universities.

One of those universities was Southeast Missouri State University. Terry, a St. Louis native, came to Southeast on a few different occasions for jazz festivals and as a result of his contributions to music education, Southeast named a festival after him. That festival is now known as the Clark Terry/Phi Mu Alpha Jazz Festival and has been held annually at Southeast since 1998.

Barry Bernhardt, director of bands at Florida International University and former director of bands at Southeast, first asked Terry to come to Southeast for a jazz festival and eventually became good friends with Terry.

"We had Clark in for that first time and it was a huge success," Bernhardt said. "Subsequently I had a relationship with Clark ... Clark became a family friend of ours and we knew his family in St. Louis very well."

Bernhardt recalled what it was like having Terry come to Southeast.

"It was always a treat having him in," Bernhardt said. "It was like having royalty on our campus at Southeast. People would come from a long distance to hear him play with our band."

Robert Conger, professor of music for Southeast Missouri State University, recalls how Terry's contribution to music education was unique.

"He really really had a passion for his art, which was jazz, and a passion for teaching jazz. And you don't always find that in a jazz musician," Conger said. "He would work with individuals as young as elementary school age and help them learn the art of jazz."

Terry contributed a lot of his time teaching and mentoring many different people in the music industry.

"Clark was one of those unsung heroes in jazz education," Bernhardt said. "He loved teaching people ... he mentored a lot of different people in the music industry, not just trumpet players."

According to Bernhardt, Terry was not only monumental to the jazz world, but he was also a great person to know.

"I can't say enough great things about him. I never saw him angry, I never saw him say a bad word about anyone," Bernhardt said. "He was just the nicest man on the face of the earth and a great role model for all of us. And just a fabulous musician."

According to Conger, the jazz world has been greatly impacted by Terry's passing.

“Across the jazz world, there’s been mourning since he passed away on Saturday evening,” Conger said. “It’s the end of an era.”

Terry’s jazz career spans more than 70 years. He has won numerous awards and has been honored by many for his contributions to music education.