

'Jazzistry' founder Vincent York to receive Martin Luther King Jr. award at Ann Arbor church

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Musician Vincent York gestures as he speaks to a class at Roberto Clemente on Thursday, Jan. 18. York will be honored as the recipient of The Church of the Good Shepherd's Award for Servant Leadership in Building a Beloved Community.

Melanie Maxwell | AnnArbor.com

In honor of the spirit and legacy of **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**, one local musician and educator is being recognized for his efforts to continue the dream. **Vincent York**, founder of the Ann Arbor-based "**Jazzistry** (<http://jazzistry.org/>)" organization, will be honored Sunday as the 2013 recipient of the Church of the Good Shepherd's (<http://www.cogsaa.org/index.html>) Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Award for Servant Leadership.

The Ann Arbor church has awarded the honor every year since 1987 to a member of the community whose work furthers the goals of the Civil Rights leader within the community.

"I'm a professional musician, I never saw myself as a person who is doing the work of Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream," York said. "When I really look at this, I guess I have a lot of those values, and I'm honored that they're recognizing me for the work that I've done."

That work started in 1994 when York founded Jazzistry, a non-profit organization that uses jazz music to teach students about American history, with a significant focus on African-American history. The program includes a teacher in-service workshop, artist visits and a full band performance to create an interactive presentation that teaches students the history of the U.S. starting from the 1600s to modern day through the context of jazz music.

Natalie Kellogg, who is a member of the Church of the Good Shepherd, has been a fan of York's music for more than 30 years and nominated him for the award after seeing the effect of Jazzistry on the students at her grandchildren's schools. She said York not only teaches students about history but keeps them motivated to play and keep playing instruments.

"What he does is just mesmerizing, it just grabs you," she said. "It gets kids personally interested in the music that they play."

Kathleen Beauvais, an educator herself and a member of the church commission that nominated York, said the integration of music with culture and history is what makes York's program significant, especially in the context of Civil Rights.

"I really think he expands the minds of students in terms of helping them understand that music relates to many facets of their lives," she said. "I think that's a real gift, and for African American students in particular, there's a deep, rich heritage there that he helps them own."

As a musician, York has music degrees from the University of Michigan and Southern University in Louisiana. He has performed all over the country with musicians including **Ella Fitzgerald**, **Sarah Vaughn**, **Aretha Franklin**, the Temptations and the Four Tops. But it was after performing at a school in Detroit when York decided to use his musical talent for education. York said he saw a lack of integration in the school that reminded him of growing up in the 1960s.

"You want somebody to do something about it," he said. "Teachers were doing as much as they could do, but nothing was happening."

York said he wanted to start a program that emphasized the contributions African Americans made to American history, especially through music. But as he researched the origins of jazz, he said he realized the music developed from a combination of sources, beginning



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America."

The award presentation is open to the public and will take place at 10:15 a.m. Sunday during church service at The Church of the Good Shepherd at 2145 Independence Blvd. in Ann Arbor. A finger food reception will follow the service.

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with the multi-racial Louisiana Creoles who had access to a large variety of music from both Africa and Europe.

"The music that they were able to play and put together was multicultural, it was all of our music, it was all connected," he said. "Diversity plays a huge part of this because of all the variations."

Now, 19 years later, Jazzistry has reached people all over the state and around the country and made more than 350 presentations at schools, community events, music festivals, church youth forums, colleges and educational conferences. The program was also the 2008 recipient of the Michigan Governor's Award (<http://www.michigan.gov/mcsc/0,4608,7-137-8168-268649-,00.html>) for arts education in Michigan schools.

York said he sees himself as a person who has benefited from the work of King and the Civil Rights movement and it is his responsibility to keep that work going for future generations.

"I think the music, jazz, is an excellent example of this richness [in diversity] that we all benefit from," he said. "That's why I want to enlighten people about the history of music, because it serves as an excellent example of the beauty of