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MIAMI-DADE SCHOOLS

Nat King Cole's children deliver gift to Miami-Dade school

The twin daughters of singer Nat King Cole donated new instruments to a Miami high school's band, part of a larger effort to help music programs hurt by budget cuts.



Nat King Cole's daughters, Casey, center, and Timolin Cole, right, watch as Miami Northwestern Senior High student Ti'Keyah Sanders checks out the new trumpet the sisters donated. PATRICK FARRELL / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

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Brianna Clark wrapped her arms around the case holding a new alto saxophone and hugged it tight in the band room at Miami Northwestern Senior High.

"This moment right here is everlasting to us," the sophomore said. "We're really thankful for it."

The moment came courtesy of Nat King Cole Generation Hope, a nonprofit founded last year by the crooner's twin daughters Timolin and Casey Cole to help school music programs that were suffering from budget cuts. The organization works with arts administrators in South Florida school districts to find out which schools are most in need.

"We can't be everything to everyone and we just want to make sure that we are giving to kids who have the greatest needs and the fewest resources," said Timolin Cole.

'HUGE HONOR'

Band director Benny Bolden said some of the instruments at Northwestern have been around since the 1970s. They survive with the help of tape and some welding fixes done by a teacher.

"Raggedy is an understatement," Bolden said. "Whatever we have, we make it work."

The tight budget leaves no funding for band, he said -- so a donation of more than 20 instruments from the organization is a huge help.

"For them to come from a rich history of Nat King Cole to want to honor my students . . . that's a huge honor," Bolden said.

The twins, who are 47 and live in Boca Raton, had wanted for years to do something in memory of their father, who died in 1965. They found their mission last year as they started hearing about budget cuts in schools from news stories and friends who were upset about music programs getting cut.

Timolin Cole said her father's work moved people from different cultures and races.

"What he did in his time with his artistry and with music, it just speaks so much about the impact and the transforming power of music," she said.

"And we really feel like this should be brought back into the forefront of the curriculum in school. Music should be as fundamental as reading and math."

The organization has previously worked with schools in Palm Beach County; Wednesday's donation was the first in Miami-Dade. The group is also working with officials in Broward to determine how to best help fulfill needs there.

The organization got the instruments donated Wednesday -- more than \$4,000 worth -- at a discount from Sam Ash, the music store. The organization also holds fundraisers, including a gala last November and a bowling bash earlier this month.

'PRICELESS' MOMENT

"I'm so grateful to have this," senior Ti'Keyah Sanders said of the trumpet strapped to her back.

"I will practice every day from now on," said the 17-year-old. "Every night. I finally have a horn that works."

Javaris Benson, 15, said it felt good that the organization wanted to help the school. He called Nat King Cole "a great man."

"I love his music," said Javaris, a sophomore. "My mom plays it all the time."

As for the thanks the Cole sisters received back from the young musicians: