

## Hartford Jazz Society

### HARTFORD

In 1961, the Hartford Jazz Society (HJS) hosted its first ever ticketed concert. The performer was a little-known jazz pianist named Randy Weston. Nearly half a century later, Weston is an NEA Jazz Master, famous for infusing the jazz idiom with African rhythms, and the Hartford Society is the oldest nonprofit jazz concert presenter in the United States.

With the support of an NEA Access to Artistic Excellence grant of \$10,000, the society welcomed Weston back to Hartford in 2006. In the afternoon before the concert, Weston provided a master class in jazz piano for students. During his evening performance with his African Rhythms Trio, the

towering pianist captivated the audience with his quirky melodies and inventive beats, just as he did 45 years ago.

And HJS was happy to bring the jazz great back. "Hartford has a long history of being a city enthusiastic for jazz," HJS president Dan Feingold said. "We're halfway between Boston and New York. In the heydays of

jazz, artists passing through would try out new numbers in Hartford."

HJS seeks to book a spectrum of jazz musicians who push the ethnic and stylistic boundaries of jazz. Other artists on the 2006 schedule included contemporary blues singer Shemekia Copeland, who sold out the Atheneum for the society. The day before the concert, Copeland coached aspiring vocalists at an NEA-funded master class held at a Hartford church. HJS plans to continue sharing the joy of jazz with young people by offering more master classes and inviting high school jazz combos to open concerts for big-name artists.



*NEA Jazz Master Randy Weston.*  
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