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Jazz legend Lewis to take Raue Center stage

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Jazz legend Ramsey Lewis has been performing for more than 50 years. The Chicago-born pianist has recorded more than 80 albums, received three Grammys and even has had his music featured on The Weather Channel's "Local on the 8s" segments.

In addition **to** being a **jazz** icon who tours the world (he performed in Japan earlier this year), **Lewis** has hosted television and radio series dedicated **to** the genre and serves as artistic director of **Jazz** at Ravinia, an annual feature at the Highland Park venue. He also helms the weekday morning show on Chicago's smooth **jazz** radio station, WNUA.

Prior **to** the Ramsey **Lewis** Trio's Saturday show at the **Raue Center** for the Arts in Crystal Lake, the 73-year-old musician discussed his home city, the variety of music that influenced him as a young performer and what he has planned for this weekend's concert.

You do a lot of work **to** promote **jazz**. Why is it important for you **to** be an ambassador for the genre?

It's a valid music. It's important because it's the United States' contribution **to** world culture. It's one of the few artistic endeavors that began here. It's all about expression. You learn **to** play in a group, you learn how **to** blend, but you also learn how **to** be an individual and how **to** perform when it's your turn.

How would you describe **jazz to** someone who's never been **to a jazz** performance?

I wouldn't. I think the best way **to** learn about **jazz** is **to** go **to** a concert or listen **to** an album. Words cannot fully express any work of art.

Did growing up in Chicago affect your music?

It did because of all the types of music that are popular here. Not only is there a big **jazz** community, but a big gospel community, a big pop and rock community. You name it. Plus, Chicago people are tolerant. When I came up and was learning what this was all about, audiences were patient with me.

How did some of those other types of music affect your brand of **jazz**?

Exposure, that's what it was. I grew up with gospel and I started playing in the church when I was 9 years old. I went **to** a multi-racial and multi-cultural high school and I was exposed **to** everything that everyone was listening **to**. My parents taught me not **to** limit myself **to** any sort of music. So, I grew up learning and loving beautiful melodies, no matter where they came from. And we can't forget the influence of European classical music. That's a very important part of my music.

What makes for a good live performance?

That's a good question. Well, I think the artist must be sincere and forthcoming and if the audience is open-minded, it becomes a love affair. It's certainly what happens when we play.

What do you mean by "love affair"?

The audience doesn't realize it, but they spur us on by the way they react **to** the music, or the way they don't react. It becomes this push and pull between artists and audience.

How does being a musician translate **to** being a radio host? Does it compare.

Communication. Any art form is a form of communication. At the piano, I'm communicating with music. On the radio, I'm communicating with words and thoughts.

I read that your music is played on the Weather Channel during the local updates. Is this true?

I can't say if it's true, but I'm happy if anyone plays my music.

What are you most proud of in your career?

There's no one thing. I can't point **to** this Grammy or this gold record and say, "That's the moment." Life is full of lots of things. Every step is about learning.

Do you have anything special planned for this weekend's show?

Yes. There will be a lot of new music that we're playing. Two suites of music we've only performed at Ravinia this year. And, of course, there will be the more familiar – the popular and the blue, the so-called hits.

What do you find most exciting **to** play these days, the new stuff or the old material?

I love it all. I just enjoy playing the piano, whether it's music by Beethoven that's hundreds of years old or something I just wrote last week.

WHEN: 3 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: **Raue Center** for the Arts, 26 N. Williams St., Crystal Lake

TICKETS: \$53, \$56

TICKETS: 815-356-9212 or

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