THOMAS JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA



Jefferson High:

The Cradle of Central Ave. Jazz

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

DIRECTED BY

Millena Gay

PRODUCED BY

HoneyPeach Productions

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

Andrew Henderson, MS

Terilyn Henderson, PhD

Logline

Jefferson High: The Cradle of Central Ave. Jazz *explores how one public high school in South Los Angeles produced an extraordinary constellation of artists across music, dance, film, and visual art, and what their legacy means for a new generation.*

ONE SCHOOL. GENERATIONS OF GENIUS. A LASTING LEGACY.

The story

A public school that became a launchpad.

From jazz legends and soul icons to trailblazing dancers, actors, animators, and visual artists, the film tells how Thomas Jefferson High School became an incubator for Black creativity — through educator Samuel R. Browne and the cultural ecosystem of Central Avenue.

What made it possible then, and what will it take to carry the torch forward?

West of the Mississippi

Jefferson is widely credited with producing more jazz musicians and composers than any other high school west of the Mississippi.

1936

Samuel R. Browne joins the faculty as the first Black music teacher in the Los Angeles public school system, building a program rooted in mentorship.

Far beyond the bandstand

Alumni include choreographer Alvin Ailey, dancer and actress Carmen de Lavallade, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Ralph Bunche.

Voices of Jefferson

Music and song

Jazz and rhythm and blues

- Dexter Gordon
- Chico Hamilton
- Art Farmer
- Horace Tapscott
- Don Cherry
- Frank Morgan
- Jesse Belvin

Dance, stage, and screen

Movement and film

- Alvin Ailey
- Carmen de Lavallade
- Juanita Moore
- Woody Strode

Art and public life

Painting, diplomacy, and law

- Kerry James Marshall
- Ralph Bunche
- Augustus F. Hawkins

An illustrative subject pool drawn from public alumni listings. Final participants depend on availability, family and estate approvals, and rights clearance. New interviews will include living alumni, families, educators, and historians.



Why now

The witnesses are aging

Many of Jefferson's greatest artists are gone, and the classmates, families, and colleagues who knew them are growing older. The stories are within reach, but not for long.

Public arts education is at a crossroads

Jefferson's legacy faces new challenges, and school communities everywhere are asking what it takes to give young people a place to make art.

Audiences are ready

Music-history documentaries like ***Summer of Soul***, an Academy Award winner, show how strongly audiences respond to rediscovered Black cultural history.

"Jefferson was more than a school. It was a launchpad for Black excellence."

Millena Gay

Documentary director and producer — HoneyPeach Productions

An award-winning director and producer whose documentary work preserves history and illuminates community. Raised in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, Millena brings nearly three decades in film and television, graduating with honors from UCLA Extension's Producing and, in June 2025, Directing programs for Film and Television.

She directed and produced the award-winning feature documentary *Golden Hearted*, chronicling the life and legacy of Congresswoman and Ambassador Diane E. Watson — narrated by Academy Award winner Danny Glover, with original music by Grammy and Emmy winner Howard Hewett, earning critical acclaim.

Her documentary credits also include the short *Fun the Emachee Way*, which she produced, and the in-production *Wake Up: This Could Be You*, which she is directing and producing through HoneyPeach Productions.

Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award
Honored for contributions to the arts and community

Robey Theatre Company
Member, Board of Directors

Mentor to emerging filmmakers
Startwith8, Women in Film, and the Black Association of Documentary Filmmakers West

"Excellence is not an option—it is an expectation and a way of life."

Executive producers

Andrew Henderson, MS

Co-founder and Executive Director

Leads the agency's operations, stewardship, and community presence. He guided Families for Children from its start as a foster and family resource agency into FFC Spiritual and Behavioral Health Center, an accredited nonprofit that treats addiction and mental health and takes care into neighborhoods through Street Medicine.

Terilyn Henderson, PhD

Co-founder and Chief Program Officer

Dr. T. Henderson is a Doctor of Psychology and Certified Clinical Master Herbalist whose work focuses on a whole-person approach to behavioral health, well-being, and the spiritual and clinical design of agency programming. She helped shape a person-centered model in which treatment, care coordination, enrichment, and Street Medicine serve the whole family, extending care beyond the counseling room.

In 1993 they chose to be proactive members of their community rather than spectators, with the aim of rebuilding it one child and one family at a time and leaving a lasting legacy of care.

Budget and financing

TOTAL BUDGET	RAISED TO DATE	SEEKING
$437,000	$50,000	$387,000

Where the money goes

Production	$124,000	28.4%
Post-production	$73,000	16.7%
Archival and music	$71,000	16.2%
Legal, marketing, and contingency	$68,560	15.7%
Creative leadership	$52,440	12.0%
Development and pre-production	$48,000	11.0%

How we will finance the film

FFC Spiritual & Behavioral Health Center
$50,000 founding commitment, received

Additional tax-deductible gifts
Through fiscal sponsor Families for Children

Grants and foundations
Arts, education, and history funders

Corporate and community sponsors
Presenting and phase partners

Individuals and alumni
Gifts at every level

Distribution partners
Broadcast and streaming

Partner with us

Presenting partner

Underwrite the film and share billing across the credits, premiere, and outreach.

Phase sponsor

Fund a stage of the work: development, production, or post-production.

Archive and music fund

Help license the photographs, footage, and recordings that bring Central Avenue to life.

Education and community sponsor

Support student screenings, a classroom guide, and neighborhood events.

Individual and alumni giving

Every gift helps carry the torch forward.

How to give

Gifts are received by our fiscal sponsor, **Families for Children, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3) public charity (EIN 95-4433393).

Make checks payable to Families for Children, Inc. and designate them for **Jefferson High: The Cradle of Central Ave. Jazz**.

Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Recognition and screening access can be tailored to each partner.



Jefferson High: The Cradle of Central Ave. Jazz

Legends begin somewhere.

Help us carry the torch forward.

Millena Gay
Director and Producer, HoneyPeach Productions

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Executive Producers
Andrew Henderson, MS and Terilyn Henderson, PhD

HONEYPEACH PRODUCTIONS