

## Wynton Marsalis and His Achievements and Rekindlement Jazz

Trumpeter, bandleader, and instructor from New Orleans, Wynton Marsalis, has become one of the most well renowned musicians of the 21st century. At the age of 12, Marsalis started his official musical training in jazz and classical music. He performed *Haydn's Trumpet Concerto* with the New Orleans Philharmonic Orchestra as a 14 year old. At the age of 17 (1979), he attended The Juilliard School in New York. When he was 19 (1981), he toured with Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams and recorded his first album as a bandleader. In Marsalis's early life, he earned many achievements, such as becoming the first musician to win Grammy awards for both jazz and classical recording, in his album *Think of One* (1982) and Haydn, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, and Leopold Mozart. He experienced controversy at a young age, due to his rise in popularity. In many interviews, the public saw him as narrow-minded. Some people have tried to argue that it was just the nature of New York City politics and media that made him seem narrow-minded. People also thought that the reason why he became a significant name band leader was to shut down styles of jazz that he did not support, such as avant-garde jazz and jazz fusion styles. Besides his controversy presented by the media, he still impacted the popularity of jazz in the 20th and 21st centuries.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout his growth as a musician, he focused on his virtuosity in jazz. Lincoln Center (NYC) introduced Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC) in 1987, which Marsalis co-founded. Since 1996 Marsalis has been head of Jazz at Lincoln Center. The ensemble performs the classical repertoire of jazz works but also premieres new pieces. The ensemble also tours frequently and works to collaborate with other artists. In Marsaelis's older years, he advocated educating the

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Kernfeld, "Marsalis, Wynton (Learson)," Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, January 20, 2002.

youth and being an ambassador of jazz. He helped with the funding of constructing the Frederick P. Rose Hall in 2004 that allowed the expansion of the educational and available broadcasting resources. From all of the new renovations was a creation of the award-winning radio series and American Music Abroad program that promoted cross-cultural understanding through music. This program was in collaboration with the US Department of State Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. After the funding of the Frederick P. Rose Hall was the creation of Essentially Ellington in 2006. Marsalis has worked to rebirth the popularity in jazz to the new generation. As an African-American, he has evened the lopsided prominent white big bands. He also has fought against the ongoing problems of copyright and distribution so that Ellington's big band music can be available to all colleges and school jazz ensembles. JALC also has many programs that help grow the community and expand. Some examples of these programs are Jazz for Young People and Essentially Ellington.<sup>2</sup>

Essentially Ellington (EE) is a high school jazz band festival that allows jazz bands from around the country to show their talent. The festivals are not the typical competitions but are designed to allow high school jazz bands to receive professional feedback from top tier jazz professionals and get to perform on the same stage as many of them. This rise in jazz in high school also increased for educators, so The Jazz at Lincoln Center Band Director Academy launched in 2000. The summer workshop for band directors allowed band directors to hone their skills in explicitly teaching big band music. Essentially Ellington differs from other festivals and

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Suhadolnik, "Jazz at Lincoln Center [JALC]," Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, November 26, 2013.

competitions because of its competition in selection. Essentially Ellington encourages all jazz programs to be the best of the best due to the selection process.<sup>3</sup>

Marsalis educated the public on jazz and technical music properly. Marsalis complains about how, in the 21st-century, looks are the priority for musicians, and talent is second. In the 20th and 21st century, a lot of the music was popular music. Jazz was not the mainstream music at the time. He believed that the music on the radio was just "the American sound" and that he is "not interested in hearing recycled versions of the same genre over and over."<sup>4</sup> Marsalis did not support music that was not interesting to him. In a media interview (1999) he was asked why he was not a fan of pop music, and his response was that "if you have, say, 35 seconds of song that's repeated over and over with no development, a song that's three minutes long with no bridge and very little harmonic interest and no solo sections and the melody isn't even that good but it's still repeated over and over again, the result may be a very clean, well-produced product, but not really a piece of music."<sup>5</sup> His opinion on popular music was negative and believed that jazz did not have enough media coverage.

Popular music in the 1990s focused on teen pop and dance-pop music, which came from the 1970s and 1980s. Alternative rock was emerging and took over the music scene. In the 1990s, fusion genres started to arise, yet rarely standard jazz. Marsalis wanted to increase the popularity of standard jazz. He sought to increase education in the youth, but also to have a

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<sup>3</sup> "About the Program," Jazz Academy (Official Website of Lincoln Center), n.d. Accessed November 15, 2019, <https://academy.jazz.org/ee/about/>.

<sup>4</sup> Andy Steiner, "Why Wynton Marsalis Doesn't Listen to Pop Music," Utne, Accessed November 20, 2019, <https://www.utne.com/arts/media-diet>.

<sup>5</sup> Steiner, "Why Wynton Marsalis Doesn't Listen to Pop Music," 1.

significant impact in his community.<sup>6</sup> In 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. Marsalis and the rest of the jazz community wanted to help. Marsalis aired A Concert For Hurricane Relief, which was a concert that aired on NBC, MSNBC, and CNBC. All of the funds that were raised from the concert went to the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. On the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday in 2006, Marsalis gave a speech to students at Tulane University that advised students to help rebuild New Orleans and to help “a slumbering nation.”<sup>7</sup> His speech inspired the youth to take action but also to remember the impact MLK had on their community. Marsalis was also honored with The National Humanities Medal by President Barack Obama in 2015 for his work on deepening the nation’s understanding of the humanities. Marsalis rekindled global interest in jazz.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Carrillo, “Special to the. “Wynton Marsalis Seeks Youth’s Musical Enlightenment,” AmNews, *New York Amsterdam News (1962-1993)*; *New York, N.Y.* January 9, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> “Wynton’s Speech at Tulane University in New Orleans,” Accessed November 21, 2019. <https://wyntonmarsalis.org/news/entry/wyntons-speech-at-tulane-university-in-new-orleans>.

<sup>8</sup> Dan Demetriad, “For Wynton Marsalis, ‘The Cause Is People.’” Msnbc.com. July 11, 2008. [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/25644088/ns/us\\_news-giving/t/wynton-marsalis-cause-people/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/25644088/ns/us_news-giving/t/wynton-marsalis-cause-people/).

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