



# Wynton Marsalis



**Wynton Marsalis** is an internationally acclaimed musician, composer, bandleader, educator and a leading advocate of American culture. He is the world's first jazz artist to perform and compose across the full jazz spectrum from its New Orleans roots to bebop to modern jazz. By creating and performing an expansive range of brilliant new music for quartets to big bands, chamber music ensembles to symphony orchestras, tap dance to ballet, Wynton has expanded the vocabulary for jazz and created a vital body of work that places him among the world's finest musicians and composers.

## Early Years

Wynton was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on October 18, 1961, to Ellis and Dolores Marsalis, the second of six sons. At an early age he exhibited a superior aptitude for music and a desire to participate in American culture. At age eight Wynton performed traditional New Orleans music in the Fairview Baptist Church band led by legendary banjoist Danny Barker, and at 14 he performed with the New Orleans Philharmonic. During high school Wynton performed with the New Orleans Symphony Brass Quintet, New Orleans Community Concert Band, New Orleans Youth Orchestra, New Orleans Symphony, various jazz bands and with the popular local funk band, the Creators.

At age 17 Wynton became the youngest musician ever to be admitted to Tanglewood's Berkshire Music Center. Despite his youth, he was awarded the school's prestigious *Harvey Shapiro Award* for outstanding brass student. Wynton moved to New York City to attend Juilliard in 1979. When he began to pick up gigs around town, the grapevine began to buzz. In 1980 Wynton seized the opportunity to join the Jazz Messengers to study under master drummer and bandleader Art Blakey. It was from Blakey that Wynton acquired his concept for bandleading and for bringing intensity to each and every performance. In the years to follow Wynton performed with Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy Gillespie, Sweets Edison, Clark Terry, Sonny Rollins, Ron Carter, Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams and countless other jazz legends.

Wynton assembled his own band in 1981 and hit the road, performing over 120 concerts every year for 15 consecutive years. With the power of his superior musicianship, the infectious sound of his swinging bands and an exhaustive series of performances and music workshops, Marsalis rekindled widespread interest in jazz throughout the world. Wynton embraced the jazz lineage to garner recognition for the older generation of overlooked jazz musicians and prompted the re-issue of jazz catalog by record companies worldwide. He also inspired a renaissance that attracted a new generation of fine young talent to jazz. A look at the more distinguished jazz musicians of today reveals numerous students of Marsalis' workshops: James Carter, Christian McBride, Roy Hargrove, Harry Connick Jr., Nicholas Payton, Eric Reed and Eric Lewis, to name a few.

## Classical Career

Wynton's love of the music of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and others drove him to pursue a career in classical music as well. He recorded the Haydn, Hummel and Leopold Mozart trumpet concertos at age 20. His debut recording received glorious reviews and won the Grammy Award® for "Best Classical Soloist with an Orchestra." Marsalis went on to record 10 additional classical records, all to critical acclaim. Wynton performed with leading orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Pops, The Cleveland Orchestra, Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra and London's Royal Philharmonic, working with an eminent group of conductors including: Leppard, Dutoit, Maazel, Slatkin, Salonen and Tilson-Thomas. Famed classical trumpeter Maurice André praised Wynton as "potentially the greatest trumpeter of all time."

## Record Production

To date Wynton has produced over 70 records which have sold over seven million copies worldwide including three Gold Records. His recordings consistently incorporate a heavy emphasis on the blues, an inclusive approach to all forms of jazz from New Orleans to modern jazz, persistent use of swing as the primary rhythm, an embrace of the American popular song, individual and collective improvisation, and a panoramic vision of compositional styles from dittys to dynamic call and response patterns (both within the rhythm section and between the rhythm section and horn players). Always swinging, Marsalis blows his trumpet with a clear tone and a unique, virtuosic style derived from an encyclopedic range of trumpet techniques.

## The Composer

Wynton Marsalis is a prolific and inventive composer. The dance community embraced Wynton's inventiveness by awarding him with commissions to create new music for Garth Fagan (*Citi Movement-Griot New York*), Peter Martins at the New York City Ballet (*Jazz: Six Syncopated Movements* and *Them Twos*), Twyla Tharp with the American Ballet Theatre (*Jump Start*), Judith Jamison at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre (*Sweet Release* and *Here...Now*), and Savion Glover (*Petite Suite* and *Spaces*). Marsalis collaborated with the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society in 1995 to compose the string quartet *At The*

*Octoroon Balls*, and again in 1998 to create a response to Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale* with his composition *A Fiddler's Tale*. With his collection of standards arrangements, Wynton reconnected audiences with the beauty of the American popular song (*Standard Time Volumes I-VI*). He re-introduced the joy in New Orleans jazz with his recording *The Majesty Of The Blues*. He extended the jazz musician's interplay with the blues in *Levee Low Moan*, *Thick In The South* and other blues recordings. With *Citi Movement*, *In This House On This Morning* and *Blood On The Fields*, Wynton invented a fresh conception for extended form compositions. His inventive interplay with melody, harmony and rhythm, along with his lyrical voicing and tonal coloring assert new possibilities for the jazz ensemble. In his dramatic oratorio *Blood On The Fields*, Wynton draws upon the blues, work songs, chants, call and response, spirituals, New Orleans jazz, Ellingtonesque orchestral arrangements and Afro-Caribbean rhythms; and he uses Greek chorus-style recitations to move the work along. The New York Times Magazine said the work "marked the symbolic moment when the full heritage of the line, Ellington through Mingus, was extended into the present." The San Francisco Examiner stated, "Marsalis' orchestral arrangements are magnificent. Duke Ellington's shadings and themes come and go but Marsalis' free use of dissonance, counter rhythms and polyphonics is way ahead of Ellington's mid-century era." Wynton extended his achievements in *Blood On The Fields* with *All Rise*, an epic composition for big band, gospel choir, and symphony orchestra - a classic work of high art - which was performed by the New York Philharmonic under the baton of Kurt Masur along with the Morgan State University Choir and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (December 1999). Marsalis collaborated with Ghanaian master drummer Yacub Addy to create *Congo Square*, a groundbreaking composition combining elegant harmonies from America's jazz tradition with fundamental rituals in African percussion and vocals (2006). For the anniversary of the Abyssinian Baptist Church's 200<sup>th</sup> year of service, Marsalis blended Baptist church choir cadences with blues accents and big band swing rhythms to compose *Abyssinian 200: A Celebration*, which was performed by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and Abyssinian's 100 voice choir before packed houses in New York City (May 2008). In the fall of 2009 the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra premiered Marsalis' composition *Blues Symphony*. By infusing blues and ragtime rhythms with symphonic orchestrations Wynton creates a fresh type of enjoyment of classical repertoire. Employing complex layers of collective improvisation, Marsalis further expanded his repertoire for symphony orchestra with *Swing Symphony*, premiered by the renowned Berlin Philharmonic in June 2010, creating new possibilities for audiences to experience a symphony orchestra swing. The New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Barbican have all signed on to perform *Swing Symphony*. Marsalis' rich and expansive body of music for the ages places him among the world's most significant composers.

## Television and Radio

In the fall of 1995 Wynton launched two major broadcast events. In October PBS premiered Marsalis On Music, an educational television series on jazz and classical music. The series was written and hosted by Marsalis and was enjoyed by millions of parents and children. Writers distinguished Marsalis On Music with comparisons to Leonard Bernstein's celebrated Young People's Concerts of the 50s and 60s. That same month National Public Radio aired the first of Marsalis' 26-week series entitled Making the Music. These entertaining and

insightful radio shows were the first full exposition of jazz music in American broadcast history. Wynton's radio and television series were awarded the most prestigious distinction in broadcast journalism, the George Foster Peabody Award. Marsalis has also written five books: Sweet Swing Blues on the Road, Jazz in the Bittersweet Blues of Life, To a Young Musician: Letters from the Road, Jazz ABZ (an A to Z collection of poems celebrating jazz greats), and his most recent release Moving to Higher Ground: How Jazz Can Change Your Life.

## Awards and Accolades

Wynton Marsalis has won nine Grammy Awards® in grand style. In 1983 he became the only artist ever to win Grammy Awards® for both jazz and classical records; and he repeated the distinction by winning jazz and classical Grammy Awards® again in 1984. Today Wynton is the only artist ever to win Grammy Awards® in five consecutive years (1983-1987). Honorary degrees have been conferred

upon Wynton by over 25 of America's leading academic institutions including Columbia, Harvard, Howard, Princeton and Yale (see Exhibit A). Elsewhere Wynton was honored with the *Louis Armstrong Memorial Medal* and the *Algur H. Meadows Award for Excellence in the Arts*. He was inducted into the American Academy of Achievement and was dubbed an *Honorary Dreamer* by the "I Have a Dream Foundation." The New York Urban League awarded Wynton with the *Frederick Douglass Medallion* for distinguished leadership and the American Arts Council presented him with the *Arts Education Award*. Time magazine selected Wynton as one of America's most promising leaders under age 40 in 1995, and in 1996 Time celebrated Marsalis again as one of America's 25 most influential people. In

November 2005 Wynton Marsalis received *The National Medal of Arts*, the highest award given to artists by the United States Government. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan proclaimed Wynton Marsalis an international ambassador of goodwill for the United States by appointing him a *UN Messenger of Peace* (2001).

In 1997 Wynton Marsalis became the first jazz musician ever to win the *Pulitzer Prize for Music* for his epic oratorio *Blood On The Fields*. During the five preceding decades the Pulitzer Prize jury refused to recognize jazz musicians and their improvisational music, reserving this distinction for classical composers. In the years following Marsalis' award, the *Pulitzer Prize for Music* has been awarded posthumously to Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane. In a personal note to Wynton, Zarin Mehta wrote, "I was not surprised at your winning the Pulitzer Prize for *Blood On The Fields*. It is a broad, beautifully painted canvas that impresses and inspires. It speaks to us all ... I'm sure that, somewhere in the firmament, Buddy Bolden, Louis Armstrong and legions of others are smiling down on you."

Wynton's creativity has been celebrated throughout the world. He won the Netherlands' *Edison Award* and the *Grand Prix Du Disque* of France. The Mayor of Vitoria, Spain, awarded Wynton with the city's *Gold Medal* - its most coveted distinction. Britain's senior conservatoire, the Royal Academy of Music, granted Mr. Marsalis *Honorary Membership*, the Academy's highest decoration for a non-British citizen (1996). The city of Marciac, France, erected a bronze statue in his honor. The French Ministry of Culture appointed Wynton the rank of *Knight in the Order of Arts and Literature* and in the fall of 2009 Wynton received France's highest distinction, the insignia *Chevalier of the Legion of Honor*, an honor that was first awarded by Napoleon Bonaparte. French Ambassador, His Excellency Pierre Vimont, captured the evening best

**"I strongly believe that, for you, jazz is more than just a musical form. It is tradition, it is part of American history and culture and life. To you, jazz is the sound of democracy. And from this democratic nature of jazz derives openness, generosity, and universality."**

*-French Ambassador, Pierre Vimont*

with his introduction:

*“We are gathered here tonight to express the French government’s recognition of one of the most influential figures in American music, an outstanding artist, in one word: a visionary...”*

*I want to stress how important your work has been for both the American and the French. I want to put the emphasis on the main values and concerns that we all share: the importance of education and transmission of culture from one generation to the other, and a true commitment to the profoundly democratic idea that lies in jazz music.*

*I strongly believe that, for you, jazz is more than just a musical form. It is tradition, it is part of American history and culture and life. To you, jazz is the sound of democracy. And from this democratic nature of jazz derives openness, generosity, and universality.”*

## **Jazz at Lincoln Center**

In 1987 Wynton Marsalis co-founded a jazz program at Lincoln Center. In July 1996, due to its significant success, Jazz at Lincoln Center was installed as new constituent of Lincoln Center, equal in stature with the New York Philharmonic, Metropolitan Opera, and New York City Ballet - a historic moment for jazz as an art form and for Lincoln Center as a cultural institution. In October 2004, with the assistance of a dedicated Board and staff, Marsalis opened Frederick P. Rose Hall, the world’s first institution for jazz. The complex contains three state-of-the-art performance spaces (including the first concert hall designed specifically for jazz) along with recording, broadcast, rehearsal and educational facilities. Jazz at Lincoln Center has become a preferred venue for New York jazz fans and a destination for travelers from throughout the world. Wynton presently serves as Artistic Director for Jazz at Lincoln Center and Music Director for the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Under Wynton’s leadership, Jazz at Lincoln Center has developed an international agenda presenting rich and diverse programming that includes concerts, debates, film forums, dances, television and radio broadcasts, and educational activities.

Jazz at Lincoln Center is a mecca for learning as well as a hub for performance. Their comprehensive educational programming includes a Band Director’s Academy, a hugely popular concert series for kids called Jazz for Young People, Jazz in the Schools, a Middle School Jazz Academy, WeBop! (for kids ages 8 months to 5 years), an annual High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival that reaches over 2000 bands in 50 states and Canada, and online learning tools.

## **Giving Back**

Wynton Marsalis has devoted his life to uplifting populations worldwide with the egalitarian spirit of jazz. And while his body of work is enough to fill two lifetimes, Wynton continues to work tirelessly to contribute even more to our world’s cultural landscape. It has been said that he is an artist for whom greatness is not just possible, but inevitable. The most extraordinary dimension of Wynton Marsalis, however, is not his accomplishments but his character. It is the lesser-known part of this man who finds endless ways to give of himself. It is the person who waited in an empty parking lot for one full hour after a concert in Baltimore, waiting for a single student to return from home with his horn for a trumpet lesson. It is the citizen who personally funds scholarships for students and covers medical expenses for those in need. Immediately following Hurricane Katrina, Wynton organized the Higher Ground

Hurricane Relief Concert and raised over \$3 million for musicians and cultural organizations impacted by the hurricane. At the same time, he assumed a leadership role on the Bring Back New Orleans Cultural Commission where he was instrumental in shaping a master plan that would revitalize the city’s cultural base. Wynton Marsalis has selflessly donated his time and talent to non-profit organizations throughout the country to raise money to meet the many needs within our society. From My Sister’s Place (a shelter for battered women) to Graham Windham (a shelter for homeless children), the Children’s Defense Fund, Amnesty International, the Sloan Kettering Cancer Institute, Food For All Seasons (a food bank for the elderly and disadvantaged), Very Special Arts (an organization that provides experiences in dance, drama, literature, and music for individuals with physical and mental disabilities) to the Newark Boys Chorus School (a full-time academic music school for disadvantaged youths) and many, many more - Wynton responded enthusiastically to the call for service. It is Wynton Marsalis’ commitment to the improvement of life for all people that portrays the best of his character and humanity.

### Exhibit A

#### Wynton Marsalis Honorary Degrees

1988	Brown University (Doctor of Music) Southern University at New Orleans (Doctor of Music)
1990	University at Buffalo - State University of New York (Doctor of Music)
1992	Boston University (Doctor of Music)
1994	University of Miami (Doctor of Music)
1995	Hunter College (Doctor of Humane Letters) Manhattan School of Music (Doctor of Music) Princeton University (Doctor of Arts) Yale University (Doctor of Music)
1996	Brandies University (Doctor of Humane Letters) Columbia University (Doctor of Music) Governors State University (Doctor of Humane Letters) Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Doctor of Fine Arts) University of Scranton (Doctor of Fine Arts)
1997	Amherst College (Doctor of Music) Howard University (Doctor of Music) Long Island University (Doctor of Music) Rutgers University (Doctor of Fine Arts)
1998	Bard College (Doctor of Fine Arts) Haverford College (Doctor of Humane Letters)
1999	University of Massachusetts Amherst (Doctor of Fine Arts)
2000	Middlebury College (Doctor of Arts) University of Pennsylvania (Doctor of Music)
2001	Clark Atlanta University (Doctorate of Humane Letters) Connecticut College (Doctor of Fine Arts)
2004	Bloomfield College (Doctor of Fine Arts)
2007	New York University (Doctor of Fine Arts)
2009	Harvard University (Doctor of Music) Northwestern University (Doctor of Arts)