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MUSIC REVIEW

Bill Cosby Leads Benefit For Jazz at Lincoln Center

By PETER WATROUS

One thing Lincoln Center's benefit for its jazz program at Avery Fisher Hall on Wednesday night proved was that Bill Cosby, the night's M.C., wasn't to be challenged. In a good-natured way, Mr. Cosby ridiculed everybody: the pianist Emanuel Ax became Manny Axe; Mr. Cosby poked fun at the young pianist Loston Harris, using his first name as a joke. When Mr. Harris pointed out that Loston was his first name, Mr. Cosby replied, "That's even worse!"

But Mr. Cosby kept things moving, and the benefit, which raised more than \$500,000 for the jazz program, was a perfectly functional variety show. In the general excellence of the music, drawn from the worlds of jazz, classical music and gospel, the production pointed out how excellence and craft permeates the best products of American culture.

The show opened with Wynton Marsalis, the trumpeter and Jazz at Lincoln Center's artistic director, performing with Itzhak Perlman, the violinist, both supported by the pianist Cyrus Chestnut. "Making Whoopee" was the tune. Mr. Perlman slung a few high-speed arpeggios. Mr. Perlman was then joined by the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra to perform Duke Ellington's "Come Sunday." He played the melody with such beauty that there seemed to be a collective gasp from the audience. Two pianists, Marcus Roberts and

Mr. Ax, then performed back to back. Mr. Roberts performed "Monk's Point," by Thelonious Monk, using stride and be-bop, creating a dense pyramid of sound, with polyrhythms rattling around, and lines and counterlines swelling up. Mr. Roberts's pieces take on gravity as they move forward; it's as if he's remembering all the things he can do to a piece.

In contrast, Mr. Ax performed a waltz by Chopin that was beautiful for its linearity. Mr. Ax's playing was so logical, each idea so well articulated and his tone so ripe, that the performance seemed made out of ice, clear and fleeting.

The show included a set of pieces by younger jazz musicians. The saxophonist Joshua Redman performed "Body and Soul," backed by a trio. Mr. Redman stretched out the tune, playing melodies in the highest part of his saxophone's register.

The show brought together a group of teen-agers — Randall Haywood on trumpet, Steven Riley on tenor saxophone, Davis Grossman on bass, and Jason Marsalis on drums — to perform "Blue Monk."

Tramaine Hawkins came out with the Lincoln Center Orchestra and a choir; she sang "Amazing Grace" with perfect control of pitch, rhythm and texture. Mr. Marsalis returned with the orchestra to perform Duke Ellington's "Portrait of Louis Armstrong," featuring his trumpet improvisations. The piece was all-jazz, reminding the audience why it was there in the first place.