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A Tribute That Is Both Rocking and Soulful

By JON PARELES

"I could never keep up with him," Mick Jagger said at the tribute to Ahmet Ertegun — the diplomat's son, record-business mogul, jazz fan, prime mover in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, dapper dresser and notorious bon vivant — last night at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Theater. Mr. Ertegun, the chairman of Atlantic Records, who died on Dec. 14 at 83, was remembered by what Mr. Jagger teasingly called "a diverse and fascinating group of people such as ourselves."

There were musicians at "Ahmet Ertegun: A Celebration" who recorded for Atlantic: Eric Clapton, Stevie Nicks, Solomon Burke, Kid Rock and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, among them. And then there were big names from the other realms Mr. Ertegun traveled in: Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, fashion designer Oscar de la Renta, movie director Taylor Hackford, fellow entertainment mogul David Geffen and Henry Kissinger, who admitted: "I found his political views, shall we say, not exactly convergent with mine. It did not matter."

The government of Mr. Ertegun's native Turkey, where he maintained ties for a lifetime, also sent a representative. Many on hand paid tribute to Mr. Ertegun's widow, Mica.

Mr. Ertegun's friends described a man with an encyclopedic knowledge of and a historian's perspective on American music — someone who parlayed a deep love of blues and jazz into countless hits. They also marveled that he was at home with everyone from drunken R&B songwriters to world leaders. They talked about late-night club visits, practical jokes and sage advice. Mr. Geffen recalled that Mr. Ertegun advised him that the way to make a lot of money in the music business was to "bump into a genius."

Mr. de la Renta recounted an exploit at a Bangkok massage parlor. Jann Wenner, the publisher of Roll-

ing Stone who worked with Mr. Ertegun in founding the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, said that Mr. Ertegun always "knew exactly what the right thing to do was."

Mr. Wenner said that Mr. Ertegun had insisted on taking the Hall of Fame's architect, I.M. Pei, to visit Graceland, Elvis Presley's mansion in Memphis. Mr. Wenner said that when he visited Mr. Ertegun in the hospital during his last days, when he was in a coma, he had asked Mica Ertegun why he looked so good. He said she replied, "Well, he hasn't

Eulogizing a music pioneer with stories from Mick Jagger and Henry Kissinger.

been drinking."

Of course there was music, a glimpse of Mr. Ertegun's connections to R&B, rock, cabaret and jazz. Wynton Marsalis, alluding to the tradition of jazz funerals, started the program with a brass band playing a traditional standard, "Didn't He Ramble," that was neatly chosen for the globetrotting Mr. Ertegun. Mr. Marsalis also had the last notes of the tribute, playing solo trumpet on "Just a Closer Walk With Thee" and "Down by the Riverside."

Mr. Clapton, leading a band that included the New Orleans pianist Dr. John, played two songs that he said Mr. Ertegun always sang when they would get drunk together: Percy Mayfield's "Please Send Me Someone To Love," a prayer for romance and world peace, and Stick McGhee's "Drinkin' Wine Spo-dee-o-dee," the single that got Atlantic Records off the ground. Phil Collins sang his dramatic solo hit "In the Air Tonight," then was joined by the rest of Genesis for a fond acoustic guitar version

of "Follow You, Follow Me."

Ben E. King sang a hit Mr. Ertegun helped write, "Don't Play That Song." Crosby Stills and Nash tried a Beatles song, "In My Life," before being joined by Neil Young for "Helplessly Hoping." Mr. Young and Stephen Stills then sang one of Mr. Young's songs from their Buffalo Springfield days in the 1960s, "Mr. Soul," about the life of a rock star. "I hope that today's musicians have someone like Ahmet," Mr. Young said.

Stevie Nicks delivered her own "Stand Back," followed by a song that she said Mr. Ertegun had urged her to sing, Led Zeppelin's "Rock and Roll."

Bette Midler, who said Mr. Ertegun could "charm the birds out of the trees," sang a risqué, Hawaiian-themed song — ostensibly about papayas — that Mr. Ertegun had once cited at a formal dinner in China. She also spoke about growing up on Atlantic's early songs. It "was music," she said, "that promised there was a party somewhere."

Solomon Burke, the hearty-voiced soul patriarch performed from a throne. He recalled one of his early recording sessions when he was handed a country song, "Just Out of Reach." Mr. Ertegun dropped by, he said, and insisted, "Sing the way that you want to. You want to preach on it, preach on it."

Kid Rock — who graciously made clear that Mr. Ertegun "did not teach me how to dress" — was joined by Sam Moore of Sam and Dave. Mr. Moore answered Kid Rock's rasp with swooping, impassioned soul phrases during the Wilson Pickett hit "In the Midnight Hour" and Sam and Dave's "I Thank You."

Mr. Jagger, near the end of the night, noted how many people had described Mr. Ertegun as a father figure, but he said he couldn't agree. "To me," Mr. Jagger said, "he was more like the wicked uncle with the wicked chuckle."



Andrew Zaeh

Wynton Marsalis led the jazz band procession at a celebrity-packed tribute to Ahmet Ertegun, a founder of Atlantic Records. Mick Jagger kiddingly called the eulogists "a diverse and fascinating group of people."