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# WYNTON LEARNS ABOUT SERIOUS FUN

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**T**he horns are lifted. The drumsticks are ready. Waiting. Then, *Unh, unh. Unh, unh, unh.* Wynton Marsalis gives his band the beat. They start to play. Hear the low *plum, plum, plum* of the bass, the *husha, husha* of the brushes as they skate along the drums. The trumpet's sweet heat fills the room.

Jazz.

And Wynton Marsalis, the most famous jazz trumpeter in the world today, is doing what he has done since

he was six: making music.

He loves to bring music to people, especially kids. When his band tours the country, he often visits schools.

Today he is in a barn at Tanglewood, a famous music center in Massachusetts. Believing that good clothes can make you feel good about yourself, he is dressed in a colorful print vest. He is teaching about music, making a tape for kids and families to watch. It is one of a series of tapes about jazz and classical

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music. He is famous for playing both types of music. It is unusual to be good at both.

He stands on a low stage talking about the structure of jazz. Kids sit all around him. Some sit in the rafters above him, swinging their legs as he speaks to them. He bounces a basketball and tosses it to a boy sitting nearby. The boy is surprised. That's what Wynton wants because he's describing syncopation, a musical beat that surprises the listener. He talks about "call and response," when one musical instrument "answers" another during a song. To show it, he and his band play the call, and the kids are to respond at a certain point. They call out, smile, get into the spirit of the music. They are involved.

He does a little march. With his voice,

he imitates musical instruments. Sometimes he jokes. Most of the time he is serious because he's talking about music.

To Wynton, music is serious fun. "Participate," he tells the kids, "and you'll understand the fun of being serious."

### BETTER THAN A VACATION

That's why he never takes a vacation. He's always working with his music or touring the world. From city to city, by bus or plane, he travels with his trumpet and his band. A vacation would take him away from music and audiences—kids and grown-ups. And he loves them too much. Wynton never leaves a place where he has performed until he has given his autograph to everyone who wants it or has posed for pictures with his fans.

### **BACKSTAGE WITH KIDS**

Wynton tells kids who play the trumpet to bring their horns to his concerts. After one concert, five boys and a girl, all elementary-school age, wait backstage. The first boy holds his trumpet under his arm and smiles shyly. Wynton walks over and shakes the boy's hand.

"I'm Wynton. What's your name?"

"Johnny," the boy says softly, looking up at his hero.

"What are you going to play?" Wynton asks.

"I don't know," Johnny says. He has looked forward to this night. He wants to play, but suddenly he is nervous.

Wynton smiles and admires Johnny's horn. Soon they are talking. Johnny gets up his courage and plays. Wynton tells him what he likes about his playing, and

tells him how to improve. "Buzz your lips this way," he says as he shows Johnny. "I'll hold up the trumpet so you know how it should feel."

Wynton holds the horn while Johnny blows into it. "Good," Wynton says. "Now practice that in front of the mirror every day."

Encouraged, Johnny promises to practice harder. He walks away smiling. Wynton gives the same kind of boost to each of the kids who play for him. One by one, he makes them all glad they play music. That's what Wynton does.

### **JAZZ GOES TO SCHOOL**

Sometimes high school bands come to hear Wynton Marsalis perform. Any school band member who loves to play the trumpet will be invited to play a song



*Backstage after a performance, a young trumpeter gets a lesson from Wynton.*