



25 YEARS OF JAZZ



IN THE
SPIRIT OF
SWING

THE FIRST 25 YEARS OF
JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

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jazz



THIS IS A BOOK OF MEMORIES ABOUT AN EXTRAORDINARY TIME IN JAZZ HISTORY,

a time no one twenty-five years ago could have predicted. Jazz at Lincoln Center is the product of one man's clear vision and still clearer focus, but as this collection makes evident it is the handiwork of a host of people of all ages and colors and genders and enthusiasms whose lives have been transformed by it, even as they have helped transform the lives of others.

There has been a lot of talk about whether there is—or should be—a jazz canon. *Merriam-Webster's* dictionary gives its seventh definition of canon as “a contrapuntal musical composition in which each successively entering voice presents the initial theme transformed in a strictly consistent way.”

For me, that's the kind of canon Jazz at Lincoln Center embodies: The compositions are great, but the transformations are what matters, and the strict consistency is to be found in excellence and swing.

GEOFFREY C. WARD

HISTORIAN

OPPOSITE. Walter Blanding demonstrates John Coltrane “walking the bar” at a Jazz for Young People performance in 2002.

FORWARD





ESOS



WYNTON MARSALIS, COFOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

AND THEN, LATE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, SOME PEOPLE decided to do something about the meaning and purpose of their national music. In the most progressive city in the world, an almost imperceptible shift in attitude was soon to become a movement. It was the latest innovation in the music of freedom: jazz music. Ironically, most of these innovators didn't even own instruments. Jazz at Lincoln Center began as three concerts initiated by a lady from Long Beach, New York, with a social vision.

ALINA BLOOMGARDEN
COFOUNDER AND
FORMER PRODUCER
JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER



PREVIOUS PAGE: Members of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra in 1992 preparing for a photo shoot with *Vogue* magazine and photographer Arthur Elgort in SoHo.

OPPOSITE: Barry Harris before his solo piano performance at Lincoln Center's Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse in 1994.

ABOVE: Alina Bloomgarden and Nat Levanthal at a reception at Alice Tully Hall following the "Duke Ellington Suites and Blues" show in 1989.

A FEELING EXPERIENCE BROUGHT ME TO JAZZ.

The winter before I started my years at Lincoln Center, I would meet a friend at Barry Harris's Jazz Cultural Theatre after long hours of work as a senior exec at Macy's. At Twenty-Fifth Street and Eighth Avenue, Barry's was a homecoming and a healing. Blacks and whites mingled with uncommon ease, the food was homemade, and the music spoke truth to me. The atmosphere was noble and humble at the same time, and I heard a language more honest than words could ever be.

However, Barry would often break into verbal riffs on the sorry truth that if something isn't done, jazz would be lost to the next generation and die out. In 1983, two years into my career at Lincoln Center, word was out they were looking for programming ideas for Alice Tully Hall in the summer. That's when I approached Lincoln Center President Nat Levanthal with the idea of Jazz at Lincoln Center, to which he memorably replied, "Write me a proposal."

I submitted three proposals between 1983 and 1987. My first two proposals were rejected; some thought jazz audiences would be rowdy (!). But Nat kept the door open. In February 1987, at the urging of Lincoln Center Chairman George Weissman, he convened a meeting of the usual producers at Lincoln Center—and me. He asked each one for program ideas for Alice Tully Hall in the summer and that's when I put forth the idea of a jazz series.

I thought jazz had a rightful place at Lincoln Center and that America's first and foremost performing arts center could make a difference in how jazz is perceived in its country of origin. I said I thought we could address Wynton Marsalis's vision. Nat asked me to come back with specific program ideas, and only then did I realize he was entrusting me to possibly produce the series.

At our first meeting, Wynton agreed to act as artistic advisor and perform free for the first two years. I got him to sign a quickly written agreement, and the first season was approved. Wynton told me to call writer Stanley Crouch, then jazz critic at the *Village Voice*, for ideas and to write the program notes.

Next, I called WBGO and tagged after Dorthaan Kirk until she finally talked to me and generously shared her Rolodex. We always laugh to remember me calling Carmen McCrae, who could be rough, and in my naïveté saying, “Hello, Carmen? This is Alina. We’re doing a tribute to Monk at Lincoln Center and would like to feature you.” When she barked her assent, we were off to the first season of “Classical Jazz at Lincoln Center.”

It’s great to recall some highlights of those first seasons. Who still remembers: Red Rodney, the trumpeter with Charlie Parker, standing center stage at Alice Tully Hall saying, “This is the best jazz festival in the world”; Dizzy and Benny Carter together at Benny’s eightieth birthday concert; Michael White and Wynton and Marcus Roberts bringing Jelly Roll Morton and King Oliver into that hallowed hall; the great pianists—Hank Jones, Walter Davis Jr., Tommy Flanagan, and Barry Harris, to name a few; Johnny Griffin, Sweets Edison, Max Roach, Roy Haynes, all the Heath brothers, Sphere and Abbey Lincoln; Betty Carter, Marian McPartland, Shirley Horn, Anita O’Day, and Jon Hendricks and the convening of the first Classical Jazz Orchestra with Ellington band alumni from all over the world?

We opened in August 1987 with a three-concert series and commissioned artwork from the inspired pencil artist Harry Pincus, whose portraits of jazz greats adorned our posters, and, along with Stanley’s writings, became a signature element of those first seasons, giving context and depth to the programs. We sold out every concert and reveled in glowing reviews; *The New York Times* called Classical Jazz “The most important jazz festival in America.” WBGO was our partner, and its DJs our MCs, but I always began the concerts with a welcome and can still feel the energy coming out of the dark from those powerfully appreciative audiences.



ABOVE: Betty Carter in front of an advertisement for the Alice Tully Hall with Classical Jazz series in 1987.

BELOW: Dorthaan Kirk, special events and community relations coordinator of WBGO, and Alina Bloomgarden, JALC cofounder, backstage at Alice Tully Hall in 1987.

RIGHT: Harry "Sweets" Edison taking a break from rehearsing for the 1988 "Standards on Horn" performance at Alice Tully Hall.

BELOW: Benny Carter, alto saxophonist, Dizzy Gillespie, trumpeter, and Ray Brown, bassist, performing at the "Happy Birthday Benny Carter" show at Alice Tully Hall in 1989.



A REPRESENTATION OF OUR COLLABORATIONS

The Abyssinian Baptist Church
Alliance for Downtown New York
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
The Apollo Theater
Arts4All Distance Learning
August Wilson Center for African American Culture
Ballet Hispanico
Barbican Centre
BET on Jazz
Bloomingdale School of Music
Brigham Young University
Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts
Celebrate Brooklyn!
The Center for Jazz Studies at
Columbia University
Central Park Conservancy
Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
Chano Dominguez & The Flamenco Jazz Ensemble
Cinémathèque de la Danse (Paris, France)
City Center Encores!
CUNY Jazz Festival
Festival Productions
Field Band Foundation
Film Society of Lincoln Center
Fordham University
Garth Fagan Dance
Greenwich High School
Harlem Children's Zone
HopeBoykinDance
Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture
International Association for Jazz Education
International Center of Photography
Jazz Aspen Snowmass
The Juilliard School
Ken Burns and Florentine Films
Lehman Center for the Performing Arts Inc.
Library of Congress
Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc.
(Lincoln Center Institute, Lincoln Center Festival,
Live from Lincoln Center, Midsummer Night Swing)
Los Angeles Philharmonic

The Louis Armstrong Educational Foundation
Louis Armstrong House & Archives
Manhattan School of Music
Mesa Arts Center
Michigan State University
Midori and Friends
Minnesota Orchestra
Murray Street Productions Inc.
Museum of Modern Art
National Endowment for the Arts
The National Jazz Museum in Harlem
National Geographic
National Public Radio
New York City Ballet
New York City Board of Education
New York City Center
New York City Department of Education
New York Film Society
New York Philharmonic
Northern Illinois University
River to River Festival
Savion Glover
SiriusXM Satellite Radio
Skidmore College
Smithsonian Institution
Snug Harbor Cultural Center & Botanical Garden
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
STREB Extreme Action
Symphony Center Presents
Temple University
University Musical Society
University of Iowa
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill
U.S. Department of State and Cultural Affairs
Washington Performing Arts Society
WBGO 88.3FM
Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts
Whitney Museum of American Art



OPPOSITE: Herlin Riley, former drummer, Monty Alexander, pianist, and Hassan Shakur, bassist, perform in the Allen Room in 2008.

ABOVE, RIGHT: Singers Tony Bennett and Jon Hendricks performing at the 1996 JALC gala.

BELOW: Sir Simon Rattle and Wynton Marsalis at the final performance of Swing Symphony, a JLCO collaboration with the Berlin Philharmonic, in 2010.



THE GREAT F



PREVIOUS PAGE: One of the top three placing bands in the 2006 Essentially Ellington competition preparing to perform at Avery Fisher Hall.

LEFT: Ravi Best, trumpeter, teaching in the Middle School Jazz Academy in 2007.

EDUCATION FOR YOUNG people of all ages is a cornerstone of Jazz at Lincoln Center.

KRYSTAL V. McNAIR, 14
MIDDLE SCHOOL JAZZ
ACADEMY, 2010-2011

JAZZ IS LIKE MY OWN SPECIAL LANGUAGE.

It allows me to communicate through my instrument. I wouldn't trade being a jazz musician for anything else, because nothing is greater than music itself. I can find the music in the wind, in the rain, and in anything natural. But the greatest thing about it is that I can give you my whole life in just a few notes.

EVEN THOUGH STANLEY CROUCH WAS KNOWN FOR HIS sharp-tongued observations, I thought Alina should call him, because he was also known for possessing an even sharper mind. He had deep feelings and respect for this music and was an indefatigable champion of its practitioners. He insisted on the highest quality in everything we did.

STANLEY CROUCH
MUSIC AND CULTURAL
CRITIC, COFOUNDER
JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

IN THE EARLY YEARS OF JALC,

the art itself was always the whole point. How much rehearsal time was necessary for a clear and precise performance, how could we get the best sound in the Hall—right there as it was felt and as it was to be experienced from the performer to the audience and back—the perfect course of meaning, execution, communication, and response? All of the planning, meetings, and discussions were focused on the great mystery of all art, which is perhaps a bit more mysterious in jazz because much of it—or much, much more—is improvised than composed. Most art does not trust decisions made in the moment, but jazz does, and fulfills itself at the split-second speeds often detailed in our Internet world, when advertising how well certain machines communicate with each other, making speed an asset rather than a threat or a liability.

But the best jazz playing is also an ongoing lesson about life itself. To improvise as well as jazz musicians do means making empathy so central to performance that a group achieves the deepest aspects of individuality and collective musical form through making audible their sensitivity to one another. Whenever empathy rules the moment, the freedom becomes so great, as Ornette Coleman said, that it becomes impersonal. The great Harold Bloom wrote something about Walt Whitman that could have been said about the blues or about Louis Armstrong, the improvising seer of jazz: “Whitman, when strongest, achieves an art in which celebration and elegy scarcely are distinguishable.” All the way from the start to last night, that is what we sought in forming Jazz at Lincoln Center, reaching from the pothole to the penthouse and back whenever necessary. Feeling, refinement, and empathy made sophisticated by a depth that has no special place of origin and no destination other than the human world.



ABOVE: Stanley Crouch, JALC cofounder, and George Weissman, Lincoln Center board chairman, celebrate JALC's installation as a Lincoln Center constituent in 1996.

OPPOSITE: The JALCO in 1992, from left: David Berger, Emery Thompson, Todd Williams, Sir Roland Hanna, Bill Easley, Wynton Marsalis, Norris Turney, Britt Woodman, Jerry Dodgion, Reginald Veal, Herlin Riley, Milt Grayson, Joe Temperley, Marcus Belgrave, and Wycliffe Gordon.



AS IF CALLED INTO ACTION BY THE GHOSTS OF AN ART form whose highest purpose was to raise our country to its own ideals, here came the contribution of Gordon Davis, a former New York City parks commissioner from Chicago who had previously given New Yorkers the gift of community through green spaces, and with him a group of enlightened citizens wanting to affect change.

GORDON DAVIS
FOUNDING CHAIRMAN
JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

SPURRED BY THE SUCCESS OF CLASSICAL JAZZ'S FIRST TWO YEARS

of late summer programs, the board of Lincoln Center created a committee in March 1989 chaired by myself, then a member of Lincoln Center's board and executive committee, to consider and recommend to the full board a future course for jazz programming. The other members of that committee were Mario Baeza, William Butcher, Mary Schmidt Campbell, Diane Coffey, Ahmet Ertegun, June Larkin, Wynton Marsalis, Tony Marshall, Albert Murray, Jonathan Rose, and Richard Schwartz. Butcher, Coffey, Larkin, and Marshall were Lincoln Center board members while George Weissman and Nat Leventhal, chairman and president of Lincoln Center, were ex officio committee members. Stanley Crouch was an advisor to the committee.

All of us involved in the early days of Jazz at Lincoln Center waged a self-conscious, systematic, relentless, and occasionally shameless campaign of education, proselytizing, and seduction to ensure that the one uniquely American, up-from-the-bottom art form—jazz—would stand on an equal footing at Lincoln Center with classical European performing arts. And we did that not only because of what we hoped Lincoln Center, with its vast resources and global influence, might do for jazz, but especially because of what jazz would do to Lincoln Center and the broader American cultural iconography. We wanted to infuse American cultural dialogue with some swing and some blues, and make sure that Ellington and Armstrong and Goodman were as much a part of the high art canon as Bernstein, Copeland, and Balanchine.

Many years before these events, when I was maybe nine years old growing up on the south side of Chicago, my father was playing some remastered jazz classics on new 45s he had just bought. Soon, he was listening intently—it was Louis Armstrong's 1928 *West End Blues*. When it ended he turned to me and said with a matter-of-fact certitude, "That may be the greatest thing American civilization has ever created." Indeed.





OPPOSITE: Gordon Davis preparing to deliver a speech at JALC in 2000.

ABOVE: The “Duke Ellington Tribute” at Alice Tully Hall in 1988, from left: Todd Williams, tenor saxophonist, Art Baron, trombonist, Britt Woodman, trombonist, Marcus Belgrave, trumpeter, Jimmy Hamilton, clarinetist, Wynton Marsalis, Jimmy Knepper, trombonist, Morris Turney, alto saxophonist, Frank Wess, tenor saxophonist.

BELOW, RIGHT: Ron Carter, bassist, and Gerry Mulligan, baritone saxophonist, discussing the arrangement for “Whisper Not” in 1994.



I HAD NO IDEA OF WHAT JALC WOULD BECOME. AT THAT TIME, we produced three summer concerts a year. I was playing almost 200 gigs a year. It was not a big commitment.

There were those who believed that an institution would be anti-jazz, anti-freedom, and, perhaps ignorantly, I was one of them. But up in Harlem there was a man from Alabama who wrote the book on the blues. He sat under a mountain of books and possessed a wisdom and mastery of subjects as diverse as military strategy, Eastern mythology, and Southern moonshine. He laid the foundation for our institutional aspirations. It was written down “as told to” by a New Orleans sitting in the front parlor with his Mobile grandfather, Albert Murray.

ALBERT MURRAY

LITERARY AND JAZZ CRITIC



THE INSTITUTION SHOULD HAVE FOUR BASIC COMPONENTS. Curatorial: Present concerts, lectures, films, and events. Educational: Teach people of all ages to know how to appreciate what you curate. Ceremonial: Hold regular celebrations, give awards, and maintain definitive traditions. Archival: Cultivate and maintain a library and memorialize what has been achieved.

TO THIS FOUNDATION WE ADDED:

**1. no segregation; 2. no generation gap; 3. all jazz is modern.
That's what we live by.**

LEFT: Historian Albert Murray in 1992.

OPPOSITE: Abbey Lincoln performing at “A Billie Holiday Remembrance” show with Jimmy Heath in 1989.

