

# WYNTON MARSALIS

## Skain's Domain

Leslie Gourse

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### Chapter One

For young pianist Nathan Rosenberg, it was already enough of a thrill to be playing solo at a birthday party for writer Kurt Vonnegut in late January 1998. The host was Warner LeRoy, whose top-floor apartment was so high up in a West 66th Street apartment building that Nathan could see three airports from it. LeRoy was owner of Tavern on the Green, a treasure of a light-bejeweled restaurant in Central Park; someone from the restaurant, who knew the way Nathan sang and played, had called him for the gig. Not a bebop pianist, Nathan can nevertheless play jazz; he knows the chord changes and many of the jazz and American popular standard songs. Furthermore, he can sing and improvise in a caressing, smooth, easy baritone. He has always been the sort of musician who, at the end of a gig, stays seated at the piano and keeps playing working at his music.

"I was playing away," Nathan later recounted, "already a little overwhelmed by the party, when I looked up, and in walked Wynton Marsalis.

My jaw dropped. Maybe I dropped some notes. He walked by me, patted me on the back" and said, You sound great.'He had a knowing smile. It seemed like he was aware of the reaction he elicits from people. He probably knew he made me nervous--and he had his horn with him."

Wynton was dressed rather formally in a suit with very good lines, Nathan noticed, and looked as if he had just come from his office at Lincoln Center, where he had been artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center for two years. Wynton lived in the same building with LeRoy and had been called in to play "Happy Birthday" for Kurt Vonnegut.

Wynton had recently won a Pulitzer Prize for his oratorio, *Blood on the Fields*, Nathan knew, and had spent his entire adult life collecting all kinds of honors: Grammys, honorary degrees, and Peabodys, to name only a few. He had been one of the few jazz musicians ever to have a cover story written about him in Time magazine. A banner depicting Wynton blowing his trumpet often flew in front of Lincoln Center. Wynton seemed to know some of the crowd: for one, Moss Hart's widow, Kitty Carlisle, the singer and actress. Vonnegut's daughter, about thirteen years old, who was learning to sing, knew two songs, including "Anything Goes." Nathan played them over and over again for her and gave her some advice on singing. Then Wynton started tutoring her.

Nathan observed how easy Wynton was to work with. Wynton told her, "When you sing, you should imagine you're a drum and think of everything rhythmically. Now listen to what the piano player is playing."

Nathan recounted, "I responded to what he was saying. There was a lot of give-and-take. He was a very sensitive person. We were looking at each other as if it was a very easy working relationship together. When it came time for us to perform in front of the group with this girl, I already knew that every time we got to the end of the B section, she would add a beat and a half, or some weird figure. I had figured out she would do this every time. So I added that beat and a half. Wynton looked at me and laughed, because he knew I had caught it.

"Kitty Carlisle sang a song, too--a very dramatic interpretation of Kurt Weill's 'September Song.'

When she did the verse, I faked my way through it. I looked at Wynton, and he seemed to say, 'Beats me.' She is theatrical. I was playing it in a florid way, not as a jazz piece. My feeling is he was kind of aware of my thought processes. Maybe I was being sharper because he was there.

"Then it came time for him to play 'Happy Birthday.' He was in one room at a distance from me. I went to stand within earshot, because I wanted to hear him play. He put his horn to his mouth and put two fingers up in the air, which means key of B flat. I ran into the other room to the piano, and I accompanied him. He

started doing something like a Creole 'Huppy Birthday,' I would call it, a very happy jazz, improvised version, and I'm playing the bass figures—New Orleans or Creole style. My fiancé would call it swampy." When Wynton came back out, he said to Nathan, "I couldn't really hear you very well in the other room. Let's play something."

Nathan had formed some opinions about Wynton before they had met that night: "I thought he was one of the young guys on the scene who had managed to take things over. While he was a great player, he may have overstepped his bounds somewhere. And in the jazz world he's a controversial player. There are a lot of older guys who could have had that gig [at Lincoln Center]. I was curious, because he sort of has a larger than life mystique about him.

"As soon as we started to play, he was incredibly expressive, particularly in his dynamics and phrasing and his choice of the range in which he plays. He'll play a song—say we did 'Sweet Georgia Brown.' And instead of playing it in the usual way, he'll emphasize notes and phrase differently; he'll squeal a note and trail down other notes. I noticed he was one of the most responsive players I've played with, in that he would draw off what I was doing and feed me things, lines to echo and support and reiterate. There was a level of give-and-take that astonished me.

"I was concentrating on my role as an accompanist. I wasn't trying to be fancy. I was trying to accompany him simply and let him ride over the line—the whole top of the chordal base. And when he chose to give me a solo, it was clear when that was. He was very in control and a great bandleader.

"There were other things I was impressed about: He was able to assess very quickly what my strengths were and to call songs in tempos and styles that brought my strengths out, accentuated them. I've never been a great bebop player, but I'm a good jazz player, but not a bebop player.

And instead of calling up [the Sonny Rollins composition] 'Pentuphouse,' he would call up some other stuff; 'Stardust' or something like that.

Things that, even if I didn't know them, were stylistically appropriate for me. Or a blues tune. Or a standard with complicated changes. His choices were interesting. Or maybe we have similar tastes in music.

"The last thing I noticed, which really impressed me, is he's a real gentleman. He said to me, 'You sound great, a strong player.' He told Kitty Carlisle, 'Ask for his card; he's a great piano player.' He was very gracious. I told him I enjoyed playing with him and would love to play with him again sometime. He wrote his home phone number down on a piece of paper and told me to call him sometime."

At a gig a few days later at Merlot, the Iridium jazz club's upstairs restaurant where Nathan was playing with bassist Steve Kirby in trumpeter Johnny Parker's trio—Nathan was talking excitedly about having played with Wynton. Nathan wouldn't dare call him, he said, but the phone number was in his pocket.

"Call him," Kirby said. "If he gave you his phone number, he means for you to call him. I know how you feel. He gave me his number, too. I wasn't going to call him. But my students were calling him. Wynton heard them playing in Terence Blanchard's groups. They were going to Wynton's house to play. I figured if my students are doing it, so can I."

Nathan laughed and decided he would do it sometime—when he got his nerve up, and when Wynton was going to be in town. At that moment, Wynton was just about finished with two weeks of rehearsals with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra for a tour of the United States, Canada, Asia, Australia, and Europe. The tour would start on January 30 and end on March 28.

Wynton stood in front of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra members in a big room at the Carroll Rehearsal Studios on West 41st Street and Ninth Avenue. They would rehearse over a hundred songs, from which he would choose each night's program for the tour called "All Jazz Is Modern." Most of his audiences would never before have heard many of the songs: a Duke Ellington piece called "Flaming Sword," for example. Wynton seemed to have a magnificent obsession with breathing new life into the old works. To the alert listener, he seemed to be achieving his aims even in rehearsals. But he wasn't always quite satisfied.

"Please remember the dynamics we went over yesterday" he said in his soft voice. "Please. . . . Yes, yes." His hair was cropped very short; just a dark suggestion of hair covered his head.

He called out, "What's next?"

"Braggin' in Brass," (another Ellington tune), someone answered.

Wynton went to take a seat in the trumpet section at the back of the orchestra. One of his current protégés, Stefon Hanis—who plays vibes and other percussion instruments—assumed Wynton's place as conduc-

tor at the front of the orchestra. To give himself a chance to play his trumpet more, Wynton had begun using Stefon as an assistant conductor. Sitting down, with his jeans that crinkled slightly over the tops of his shoes, and his suspenders over a crisp shirt, Wynton began playing the tune with its boom-chang beat.

"Hold it," he called out. He wanted it played slower. "A—one two—um" he said.

The orchestra kept starting and stopping at his bidding. "Everything hinges on that note," he said, meaning a B, and he played something that growled.

He asked, "What tempo do you want to play it in?"

After playing a little more and simultaneously hearing what everyone else in the orchestra was playing, Wynton stopped the music again and said, "Another thing is we don't want to get all wild sounding on our horns." He wanted the horn parts to work well with the rhythm section, he explained.

Tall, burly Rodney Whittaker was slapping his bass. Drummer Herlin Riley, who had joined Wynton's group shortly before the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra became a gleam in anyone's eyes, was playing the bass drum in the New Orleans-rooted style, boom-chang, boom-chang, playing the rhythm from the bottom up.

"Listen, bruh", that's halftime," Wynton said to the whole orchestra, "like that. Okay, let's go from the top again. Let's try to get the notes under our fingers. It's still too wild. Also, try to understand the arrangement. Don't just play your part. Know the whole thing, and the music will be more interesting. And you're going to sound better. . . . Let's go again, Bruh . . ." he said.

When they finished, he said, "Go again." And "again."

So it went every day for a week" from 11:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., with breaks for meals-or sometimes just for the fresh bagels, cheese, and coffee on a long table in the rehearsal room.

Then the setting changed to the tenth floor of the Lincoln Center building, where the Stanley Kaplan Penthouse is housed and many Jazz at Lincoln Center events, such as lectures, movies, and solo performances, take place; the rehearsals continued.

One day, the band broke up an hour early at 5:00 P.M., so that everyone had a chance to get to a television set to watch one of the college football bowl games. Even Wynton went home to watch the game, although his overriding passion in sports is basketball. Many other nights, taking a cue from Wynton's work ethic (he seemed to be constantly playing somewhere), some of the band members took on gigs around town.

They played in small groups together in little clubs, for little to moderate-sized paychecks.

On Monday night, January 26, they went to the Jazz Standard, a new, spartan club near Gramercy Park.

Wynton took a group there to play a tribute to pianist and composer Walter Bishop, Jr., who had just died of lung cancer. The gig, which originally had been planned as a fundraiser for Walter, ended up as a means of collecting money to cover whatever bills he may have had left.

On a break between sets, Wynton and some of the musicians—including Wessell "Warmdaddy" Anderson, an alto saxophonist, sat together at a table, eating hamburgers and drinking Cokes. There was obvious camaraderie between the leader and sidemen, who laughed and chatted together. Wynton shared someone's drink he has a passion for Coca-Cola.

Moving to the bar, he began to talk to Rodney Whittaker about death. Whittaker wondered what death would be like.

An older woman standing nearby said, "You might miss being here on this earth."

Wynton said, "It all depends on what you're doing here. It might be better over there."

This was a stunning thought to come from a thirty-six-year-old man so busy doing what he loves. His remark reflected a deep faith in the possibility of life after death. Even with all his accomplishments and rewards power and wealth, he was clearly no stranger to stress and malaise.

Despite playing so late that night, on the next morning, Tuesday, January 27, Wynton went to the Stanley Kaplan Penthouse on West 65th Street at 11:00 A.M. in time for the press conference announcing the formal start of the upcoming tour. Thick press kits with the complicated itinerary were passed out.

The band faced two more days of rehearsals. On the last day the orchestra stopped for late lunch. Wynton ran out of the room with one of the thirty-five Jazz at Lincoln Center staffers, April Smith, trailing after him. She was trying to catch his attention so she could ask a question. "Wait a minute, little Wynton," she said.

That was what everyone called his son, Wynton, Jr. April liked to call the father the something. She, among others, noticed he liked to clown around and act the way his son did at times. Wynton liked the suggestion. Not only was it amusing, but it underscored Wynton's youthful appearance. He's not very tall, though quite compactly built, and he had become trim again after a year or so of a tendency toward moonfacedness.

He slowed down to chat with her on the way to the elevators. About half an hour later, he walked quickly back into the rehearsal room, where a small crew of television newspeople from Australia was waiting. He

would soon be playing "down under." He sat on a high stool and greeted them warmly, casually—the way he greets everybody—with total ease. In response to something one reporter asked, he said, "I'm always late. Ask the guys."

She said something off-mike.

"No, they don't mind if I'm late. They're glad when I'm late."

Everyone within earshot laughed. Wynton enjoyed the sound of laughter around him—except when he was at work on music. For about ten minutes, he talked about the upcoming tour and the beauties of Ellington's music, classic jazz, New Orleans music, and Louis Armstrong.

Wynton always pronounced Armstrong's name Lew-is, not the more casual Lou-ee, as a sign of respect to the master. He also spoke of his own errant ways at the beginning of his career, until he realized the value and appreciated the beauty of the foundations of "jazz music."

Suddenly he was off the stool and facing the orchestra, which was awaiting him. The members started again, playing one of the scores of songs they had been honing for performances around the world. One piece was a vivacious, exciting, joyful excerpt from Wynton's original ballet score, "Sweet Release." It had not been issued yet on any commercially available recording, though it might be among the best and certainly most inspiring pieces of music he has ever written.

At the end of the rehearsal, Wynton told everyone to "be on time, be on time, be on time, yes, yes," for the bus that left the next day from the Radisson Empire Hotel across the street from Lincoln Center. Once the musicians were released from their rehearsal seats, they seemed to bristle with excitement. They talked in short sentences, moving a little stiffly, jerkily, reluctant to stand still and chat for more than a moment. "I'm ready to go"; "I'm all set"; "I can't wait to get going now," various musicians told anyone who asked them how they felt.

The band set out on a mind-boggling schedule—the sort that Wynton has kept up with one way or another since he was about 20 years old.

Each of his musicians would earn \$20,000 for the two-month tour. They were always hired on a contract-per-engagement basis. Seasons for the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra started in October and went to May, with concerts every year in October, then a tour from January to March. In the spring came a high school band competition, followed by a summer tour in July. Every event was on a separate contract.

Not long after he left town, Wynton flew back from Toronto to attend a press conference to celebrate the announcement that Jazz at Lincoln Center would have its own theater, on the site of the Coliseum at 59th Street, at Columbus Circle. The Coliseum would come down, and the performance space and offices would go up. It was another dream come true for the jazz program.

Without even stopping by his apartment, he flew back to Toronto to the gig there with his orchestra. It had already wended its way from Morristown, New Jersey, to West Point, New York, then to Toronto.

From there, it moved on to Cleveland; Indianapolis; Springfield, Illinois; Kalamazoo, Michigan; then Chicago, for a few days. Next up were Wausau, Wisconsin; Minneapolis; Storm Lake, Iowa; and Seattle, for three days (the cities with multiple performances also afforded the orchestra a little time off between trips), and then Salem, Oregon; and Arcata, Santa Rosa, Berkeley, and San Francisco, California.

Actually, Wynton had no days off, just time off the bandstand. Joe Temperley, the band's baritone saxophonist who doubled on soprano sax, noticed how Wynton, as usual, spent afternoons in the smaller Midwestern cities. When he had no music clinics scheduled in schools, Wynton would visit the schools unannounced to give music lessons to students. Temperley thought Wynton was "terrific" to do that.

While Wynton was in San Francisco, he met with his brother Branford, a saxophonist; Slide Hampton, the trombonist and arranger; tenor saxophonist and Duke University music professor Paul Jeffrey; and Joe Temperley. They gathered together in a hotel room to listen to tapes and decide which high school bands would be finalists in the band competition—named in honor of Duke Ellington—that was scheduled for mid-May at Lincoln Center. Then Wynton flew with his orchestra to Seoul, South Korea.

The buses, the trains, the limousines, the water, the towels and refreshments in the dressing rooms, the good, clean hotels—everything was well planned and arranged. Wynton alone had been in charge when his group had begun touring in the early 1980s. Now the Jazz at Lincoln Center staff, headed by Rob Gibson, kept the machine oiled. Gibson took enormous pride in the work.

The band's itinerary covered Seoul, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Manila, and Singapore, then Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, and Adelaide, Australia, followed by a long flight to Lisbon, Portugal, on March 11. The group made the trip back to the United States on March 16, for a three-day break. Then a concert, with the tour's title switched to "In Progress: The Marsalis File," took place at Alice Tully Hall on March 19 and 21.

In New York, Wynton, with a dry cough, which he told people was bronchitis, kept up a full schedule. On March 19, he had one of his media days—entire days devoted to meeting critics and reporters—in his apartment, from which he can see the Hudson River. His building's lobby near Lincoln Center has the look of an old-fashioned library, with pictures on the walls depicting views of an audience from the perspective of performers, among them ballet dancers on stage. Here is the view from the business side of the footlights. In the back of the lobby is the elevator to Wynton's apartment. His personal publicist, Marilyn Laverty—whom he met during his first days of recording for Columbia Records in the early 1980s, when she worked as a publicist—answered the door. He was busy with a television crew and was delayed for his next appointment, she said. The new visitor waited in a dark, wood-paneled study, with dark green, comfortable armchairs, a lone plant on the windowsill, a pair of binoculars facing inward, and a few pictures of Duke Ellington and other musicians on the walls.

On the desk were several classical scores, among them Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin*. On the coffee table was Wynton's own book *Sweet Swing Blues on the Road*, a tale of his life with his septet before he turned his full attention to Lincoln Center; a Cole Porter collection on the art of Romare Bearden; and the history of men's fashion; and *Viva Picasso*.

On the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves was a diverse collection: Frank Conroy's *Body and Soul*, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, and books of poetry by ancients and moderns, Europeans and Americans, blacks and whites. There were collections of Ovid, Goethe, Richard Wilbur, *The Poet in New York* by Federico Garcia Lorca, who wrote magnificent, vivid poems about Harlem: "And the one with his heart broken meets on the corner the incredible crocodile . . ."; and "Each day they kill in New York . . . hundreds . . . thousands." There were books of philosophy, and *The Odyssey*, and *The Greek Way*, which is a discussion of Greek writers, and three plays by Euripides, and fiction, and a book on the development of language, and *Music Was Not Enough* by Bob Wilber, *Beyond Category: The Life and Genius of Duke Ellington*, and *Primary Colors* by Anonymous. There were also books by Jonathan Kozol, who became famous for his first book *Death at an Early Age*, about the failures of the public school system and the shortchanging of minority-group children, and books by journalists Charles Kuralt and Carl Rowan.

To the right of this room with its dark ambience is a little room done in blue and white, seemingly filled with light, obviously for children—Wynton's sons. It has bright blue wallpaper on the ceiling flecked with white stars, stuffed toys on the windowsills, pictures on the walls, and a photograph of two smiling women and three little boys. Though Wynton has three sons, there are only two beds in this room. His eldest sons, Wynton, Jr., and Simeon, whose mother is Candace Stanley, live within easy visiting distance of Wynton, in a suburb of New York, with Candace, her husband, and their two younger children. But Wynton's youngest son, Jasper Armstrong, whose mother is actress Victoria Rowell, lives on the West Coast with Rowell and her daughter.

The room in which Wynton was sitting with the television crew, beyond the dining room with its table piled high with papers, had a light aura with a white-and-blue color scheme, too. Without coughing at all, he talked about Louis Armstrong: how Armstrong was built like a bull, not too tall; how the trumpet is a physical instrument; how Armstrong had a big scar on his mouth from the metal mouthpiece pressing on his lip and the stress of all the high notes he hit to please audiences. And how could he give himself such a scar? Wynton wanted to know, letting the obvious answer hang in the air.

The woman interviewing him asked about Armstrong's idiosyncrasies. Wynton didn't flinch and talked about Swiss Kriss, the laxative that Armstrong took every day. "Country people," Wynton said. "He had to have his laxative and his marijuana. He smoked him some weed, every day. . . . And there was a bright shining light in his horn.

"He had profound feeling plus technical mastery that's genius. . . . He was soulful . . . down home. He would play the harmonies and improvise off King Oliver's improvisations." Wynton explained about Armstrong's first job, when he went to Chicago from New Orleans, "not just to play second trumpet and play harmonies and improvise off Oliver's lines, but off Oliver's own improvisations on his own lines. Armstrong knew Oliver's music so well that he could improvise off the improvisations."

Minutes after the TV session ended, an interview with a print journalist took place in the dark study.

Coughing, Wynton refused tea. An hour and a half later, another television crew arrived, and that session began in the bright room off the dining room. Wynton knew his schedule, because it was posted by his secretary Genevieve "Jen" as he called her—on the back of his bathroom door and his refrigerator.

When Wynton wants to get to the office for Jazz at Lincoln Center or Alice Tully Hall quickly, he can exit his building by an escalator at the back of the lobby. The escalator brings him to the concrete walk from

which he can get into Juilliard, the elevator bank to the Stanley Kaplan Penthouse, or the Walter Reade Theatre, or take another escalator that goes down to Alice Tully Hall. On bright days, when he steps off the escalator from his building, he is bathed in sunlight gleaming on the whitish stone of the arts complex. One can have the feeling of having just emerged into paradise.

On March 19, his bronchitis notwithstanding, Wynton kept his date at Alice Tully Hall with the orchestra—all the men dressed in elegant beige-colored jackets, black pants, and white shirts with bow ties—to play a program of his own difficult music. This included not only excerpts from his ballet score, “Sweet Release”—commissioned for the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater’s production choreographed by Judith Jamison, and premiered in August 1996 as part of the Lincoln Center Festival—but an exciting long piece called “Big Train,” in which he communicated one of his early childhood, musical impressions: the sound of a train going ka nunk ka nunk, ka nunk ka nunk, along with his elder brother Branford’s impression of the train whistle’s woo woo woo woo.

When Wynton coughed during his opening monologue about how the orchestra had just flown into town, he said: “If I mess up [the music], the bronchitis is no excuse.” And: “We had a twenty-four-hour flight from Adelaide to Lisbon. . . . Wes [Anderson, the alto saxophonist] fell asleep during one of the concerts, and Walter [Blanding, a tenor saxophonist sitting next to Wes on stage] did not wake him up.” (During this concert, one critic noted that another musician fell asleep onstage.)

Wynton invited the audience to add their names to a mailing list in the lobby for material from the Jazz at Lincoln Center Program. “We’re not going to send something ugly,” he said. (That’s one of his favorite lines.) “If we send anything ugly, be sure we had a fight in the office about it.”

With a tiny trace of apology in his tone, Wynton announced the orchestra would play his original music for the night. (Wynton retains the small townner’s habit of deprecating his own achievements. Bragging is a New Yorker’s skill.) Then, with his introduction over, trumpeter Riley Mullins played the blues-rooted, happy brassy introduction for “Sweet Release,” and the concert took off full blast instantly.

Some of the music sounded a bit derivative, a portion slightly reminiscent of, perhaps, “Cool,” a Leonard Bernstein tune for *West Side Story*.

But mostly the harmonies, voicings, colors, and textures were informed by Duke Ellington’s music, which Wynton has studied assiduously.

The orchestra moved like greased lightning through sharp turns and quick cuts of the evocative pieces. The musicians had achieved the communion between the rhythm and horn sections that Wynton had urged them to seek in rehearsals. Much of the music literally tells a story. But, instead of words, the musicians use the different sound textures at their command to express the many elements of the plot. The textures and colors of the music depict the love story in “Sweet Release” and paint the passion of an amorous couple. As “Sweet Release” progressed from the meeting of the hero and heroine in a section called “Church Basement Party,” to a fight they had, Victor Goines—who plays all the reeds and excels with his rich sound and fluidity on the clarinet—used that instrument to play the devil’s part.

Wynton explained the action: “The man plays loud but don’t get rid of the devil. The woman brings the devil to a slower tempo and the devil’s afraid. Two things the devil is afraid of: anything in 5/4 time—lot of people are afraid of that—and a slow tempo. The devil ends up in a low register—that’s it for him.” For the last movement, the only thing left for the couple to do, Wynton said, is run the devil away. “And that’s what happens.”

The audience loved it. So did the *New York Times* critic, Peter Watrous, who, although he had reservations about the organization and length of the hour-long “Big Train,” summed up the evening: “Mr. Marsalis was working with the orchestra as brush and paints, and he was after something unconventional. Even without solos, the music reached all sorts of destinations, from humor to sensuality to gentleness. Finally, after the virtuosity of the conception was put aside, he came forward as an emotionalist, moved by history and by American themes.”

Watrous’s review was a far cry from some of the criticisms that had been leveled at Wynton, as he evolved over the years, by a variety of other critics and musicians. They took issue with his playing, calling it technically proficient but cold, and his compositions derivative. Some critics were most disturbed by his direction awry from experimental and free jazz and new music.

Marsalis had first come on the scene playing intense, hard bop music as a member of Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. But, as he grew older, he moved away from Blakey’s concept, to bebop in small ensembles, and then to swing and New Orleans jazz. He was essentially uninterested in the “free jazz” experiments of the

early 1960s. For one thing, he thought this music alienated jazz audiences, and he personally didn't like it. He was also vehemently opposed to the blending of electric and acoustic instruments that created the commercial fusion style of 1969 and thereafter, even though fusion appealed strongly to a large audience. Wynton had slammed the door on rock or pop music in his own life, explaining that it wasn't jazz, and he had grown to emphasize an earlier, seemingly less complicated era than bebop: primarily the swing era, in which Ellington and Armstrong had thrived and reigned. Wynton sometimes even went back as far as Jelly Roll Morton's music, or forged ahead to Thelonious Monk's compositions, and even to more contemporary modernists like bassist Charles Mingus and Wynton's beloved saxophonist John Coltrane. Yet his heart and soul seemed to belong to the old masters most of all.

Wynton's own music, notably his Pulitzer Prize-winning oratorio, *Blood on the Fields*, was palpably filled with his study of Ellington's harmonies and voicings, and many of his other compositions were strongly informed by his feeling for his New Orleans roots. As Count Basie had founded a blues-based band and discovered how well it worked for him, Wynton had realized that the feeling and style of New Orleans music gave his jazz playing joyousness, strength, and universal appeal.

Although Wynton's music recalled the work of Ellington and the New Orleans masters, it would be unfair to say he merely copied it. Many of his harmonies and voicings showed his unique touch and reflected his position as a musician-and man-living in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Wynton wanted to build on the legacy of the past greats, not merely repeat their work.

Despite the many obvious influences on Wynton's music, Wynton wasn't sure of what his orchestra had sounded like. "The energy was strange," he confided to a writer after the March 19 concert, "but I don't know. I never know. I just play. You never actually know what's going on. I just play."

Between the March 19 and 21 dates at Alice Tully Hall, the orchestra went to play for a night at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C.

Richard Harrington, a writer and jazz critic for the *Washington Post*, who caught Wynton's March 20 performance, agreed with Peter Watrous's mostly happy response to Wynton's own compositions and the way Wynton and the orchestra played them.

Wynton didn't go to bed right away after the Washington concert, despite the cough that was still bothering him. No, no. A *Washington Post* gossip columnist caught his unofficial, late-night set "The music pouring out of the small, smoky Mayflower Hotel bar late Friday night certainly sounded a lot better than your average lounge act. After his gig at Constitution Hall, tmmmpeter Wynton Marsalis and his rhythm section set up in the hotel's intimate space. Marsalis wailed until nearly 2:00 A.M., and his group jammed until 3, thrilling the patrons. . . . "Wynton's men had met there with a band led by a drummer from New Orleans booked to play in the bar, and they couldn't resist the chance to jam with their friend.

A few more performances followed: Newark (March 22) and Princeton, New Jersey (March 23); a Jazz for Young People's concert rehearsal (March 24) led by Wynton; then University Park, Pennsylvania (March 25), Oxford, Ohio (March 26), and Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania (March 27), with performances each night, while Wynton led educational sessions in the afternoons.

On Saturday, March 28, when the orchestra ended its tour in New York City, Wynton went to Alice Tully Hall for 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. performances of his Jazz for Young People series—sold-out concerts that have addressed, in the past, such burning topics as "What Is Swing" and "Who Is Louis Armstrong?" and "Who Is Duke Ellington?"

Wynton opened this performance about "What Is Cool?" by introducing his group, seven members of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra; he waited for a while to mention his own name. He said, "I give my own name plenty of space. That's cool." He explained how food can be cooked over a high flame or a low flame; the low flame is the cool way to cook and just as thorough and intense a method as a high flame. So the slow flame is very deceptive, he explained.

Finding himself talking into the wrong microphone, he picked up his papers from the lectern in front of it and switched to the right microphone. "Now, you don't see me rushing and hurrying to get from one mike to another," he said. "When you make a mistake, take your time," he said. "That's your first lesson in being cool today." The audience roared, or at least the adolescents and everyone on up to their parents did.

"To be cool, you have to be relaxed" Wynton said. "Don't rush from place to place." He went on to relate his ideas to music, explaining that cool music is played at slow or medium tempos, and cool musicians figure out the ways to make fast tempos sound slow. He asked baritone saxophonist Joe Temperley to play Benny Carter's ballad "When Lights Are Low." Carter is a much-revered, traditional multi-instrumentalist, arranger,

and composer in the jazz world. "Now he took his time," Wynton said about Temperley's interpretation, "and you didn't see him moving around, messin' around."

"To mess it up, turn the music up loud. That's popular music,"

Wynton said, taking the opportunity to beat one of his favorite whipping posts (and to stir up critics of his opinions about popular music). He asked his trombonist, Wycliffe Gordon, to blast away on a tune. Wynton mentioned that pop music "has us all deaf." He was really pulling out all the stops to slay the pop dragon.

To show the early roots of the cool style, Wynton selected the tune "I'm Coming Home, Virginia," as it had been played in the 1920s by legendary trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke and Bix's good friend, saxophonist Frankie Trumbauer. That led to a discussion of the "President of the Tenor Saxophone," Lester Young, who first became known in Count Basie's band in the 1930s. Young had started the cool school for tenor saxophone players. He in turn was an heir of Trumbauer, whom Young had heard on recordings, which started to spread the sound of the music and help young players to learn about jazz.

"Lester may have been the coolest musician who ever lived," Wynton said. Lester didn't jump around. "He had soft eyes. That was important," Wynton explained. A cool person has to have soft eyes, or else his eyes might look cold and hard, and that's not cool.

Wynton continued: "Lester spoke softly and made up witty nicknames for people and invented humorous expressions." (When he liked something, he said he had "eyes" for it.) "And he played in a soft, lyrical way. The lyrical way to play is with embellishments—but without verbosity or florid decorations," Wynton explained. "It's the difference between a man handing a woman a bouquet of flowers and saying," Wynton whispered, "I thought of you" or saying," he growled, "'Take this.'"

The audience laughed heartily, loving Wynton, learning from him, enjoying his romance with metaphors. He had long ago noticed about himself that he could, almost magically as poets do, see similarities in dissimilarities—the relationships between all types of ideas and disciplines; ever since he had been a boy in elementary school, he had known he could do that.

Wynton went on to explain the subtlety and introspection of the cool approach to jazz and showed a film clip of Lester Young, who always held his saxophone at a tipped angle. Wynton pointed out that Lester, playing an intense, soulful blues, had been holding a cigarette between two fingers and didn't get burned. "And you knew he wouldn't get burned," Wynton said, "because he was cool."

After Lester, Wynton said, bebop came along. With his own orchestra's alto saxophonist, Wessell Anderson, Wynton played a fast, hot, bebop song, a cache of sixteenth notes, suggesting the styles of the great bebop founders, Charlie "Bird" Parker and Dizzy Gillespie.

Following bebop, among other styles, came the introspective, cool musicians thinking about private matters. Wynton said, "The embodiment of the introspective trumpeter is Miles Davis. Miles had a raspy voice. That was the first thing that made him cool.... He rarely spoke more than a few words at a time. If someone came up to him and said, 'I love you, and I have all your records', Miles said, and Wynton, who has a slight catch or rasp in his own voice, imitated Miles's whispery voice, "'So? What do you want?' Or a fan might ask Miles, 'When did you record this?' And Miles would look away and not answer."

Wynton explained that Miles primarily played spare themes in the middle register of the trumpet and had an introspective approach and sound with no vibrato. "Miles let the color of his sound [without vibrato] carry the emotion of the song. . . . Cool musicians cover up, so people don't know how you feel. Miles used a Harmon mute to cover up how he felt—and held notes for a long time." Wynton affixed a little Harmon mute to the bell of his trumpet and demonstrated the eerie, haunting sound—the antithesis of happy, New Orleans music.

Wynton further explained that cool musicians like to play in odd or complex meters—5/4, or 7/4, for example, instead of 4/4—"since the music is so simplified that the meters don't clutter it up." Wynton used alto saxophonist Paul Desmond's song "Take Five" as an example of a distinctive cool sound for intense, swinging jazz music. All along, Wynton used film clips of these musicians to demonstrate the ideas.

Then he came to Latin jazz, which anybody can do is not cool. But Stan Getz, a disciple of Lester Young, brought some Brazilian music—the bossa nova—to prominence in the United States. That relaxed, lyrical, melodic music created sparks with its rhythmic complexity.

Wynton divided the audience into three parts. One part was asked to sing "tu tum, tu tum," a bass drum part. The other side of the room sang "chi chi chi chi" quickly. Those in the middle clapped their hands. Once the audience settled into their parts, Wynton said, "So I see you all have respect for that vibe now." Vanessa Rubin came on stage to sing "The Girl from Ipanema," a well-known bossa nova tune, which ended the 11:00 A.M. performance.



Many people have been turned away from these performances for young people, because not enough seats exist in Alice Tully Hall to satisfy the demand. Critics have praised the series to the skies. Yes, yes. It was hoped that with the acquisition of the Coliseum space, the new theater would eventually be able to accommodate the demand for tickets in the twenty-first century. But that theater would probably have only 1,100 seats, as Alice Tully Hall does. So the solution was not on the horizon.