

Wednesdays with Wynton on Instagram Live

Episode 13 – June 24, 2020

00:00 Madelyn Gardner: Hi everybody and welcome back to Wednesdays with Wynton. My name is Madelyn. I am the PR manager at Jazz at Lincoln Center and thank you for joining us for another Wednesdays with Wynton, a casual IG live Q&A with Mr. Wynton Marsalis. Wynton will be joining us in just a moment. So, if you wanna go ahead and start asking any questions in there in the comments, go ahead and I'll try to get to as many as possible. And while we're waiting for Wynton to come in, go ahead and comment your name, where you're tuning in from, any music you've been listening to, maybe some other people can get some nice recommendations. And as always, since it is Wednesday, I want to remind you that we have our next video from the vault at Jazz at Lincoln Center's YouTube page released. And this is a full concert from May of 2019. It's a Jazz at Lincoln Center orchestra featuring the incomparable jazz organist, Joey DeFrancesco, Big Band B-3. It's a really amazing concert. I highly suggest it. Really soulful, really spiritual. So you can check that out on our YouTube page. So, Wynton will be joining us in just a second. So if you can hold on and we'll start this Q&A.

[pause]

01:33 MG: Hi, Wynton!

01:34 Wynton Marsalis: Hey, Mad.

01:36 MG: How's it going?

01:37 WM: Good. What you talking about Madelyn?

01:38 MG: Well, I was just talking about our from the vault video, which was from 2019, May. It was a great Joey DeFrancesco and the JLCO Big Band B-3. And what's so great about this concert, other than it being a really soulful, spiritual concert, is that on trumpet we had Giveton Gelin, who obviously is a student of yours from Juilliard, and I thought we can kind of kick things off today, talking about... Obviously, in jazz music, and really any music and in humanity, it's so important to foster young talent, young musicians, young people. So I thought if you can kind of talk a bit about your experience coming up in the jazz world, your mentors, and for full circle now what it's like to be a mentor.

02:20 WM: Well, first I want to say about Giveton. Giveton, is just an unbelievable trumpet player with a very personal sound, also just deeply soulful, young man. And I first met him, I don't know, he's 12 or 13, very young. He has an album called True Design. If you can go online and check it out, you can get it. Check his playing out. He's the type of person who can change the feeling in the

room with the weight and feeling of his sound. And I think that... Yeah, when I was young, I was always around the musicians. My father and all the great jazz musicians who come through New Orleans and even though at that time I wasn't a fan of jazz the music, I like the music everybody liked in my age group. I loved them as people and they were always funny and witty, and they were always inviting at down home. Even the ones who were mean will still kinda had their own way. They were nice.

03:18 WM: Like Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis or somebody you didn't play with. But even Lockjaw, he was such a deep personality and he was such a profound person. And I've been very fortunate in my life to have many great mentors of all kinds and to play with great musicians and to listen to them and be told things by them. And I also have played with a lot of great musicians that are my contemporaries, and many younger musicians. And whenever I have the chance or any of us have the opportunity to embrace them and bring them into our feeling. Of course, we do that because as you get older, you have more funny experiences with musicians because at one point, you're teaching them things but then at another point, they teach you a lot. I love Giveton, he's got beautiful sound.

04:11 MG: I wish everyone can go check him out. I'm sure he has a lot of videos on YouTube as well. Really great player, and you can check him out playing on our from the vault concert today, if you go to [YouTube.com/jazzatlincolncenter](https://www.youtube.com/jazzatlincolncenter). And I also wanted to mention the great Hermeto Pascoal, who just turned 84, he contributed so much to jazz and Brazilian music. And Hamilton de Holanda, Dan Nimmer and Carlos Henriquez did a video tribute for his birthday. Let's talk a bit about Hermeto and what he means to you and music.

04:44 WM: Hermeto, they call him universal musician. He's a genius. If you just look him up and look at the number of instruments he plays, that's gonna tell you all you need to know. And when we opened the House of Swing in 2004, Hermeto was part our opening series of concerts. Endlessly creative. He's coming up with all kinds of tunes, unbelievably sophisticated sense of harmony progressions, melodic, just the spirit around him of just deep spirituality, originality, and Hamilton and Dan and Carlos were playing this tune when we were in Brazil. I'm not gonna mispronounce the name, but it's an unbelievable song, it's very sophisticate.

05:33 WM: Hermeto writes everything from little diddies and stuff that you could... Somebody could be listening on the street to some of the most sophisticated music. Just a kinda seer, a person who sees into the future and the past at the same time. And incredible range of musical virtuosity, not tied to an instrument. He played more instruments than... He can make anything into an instrument. He even played a pig as an instrument once. And he's somebody that's very very important in the world of music and important to know, one of the greatest thinkers and great creative forces, an icon in Brazil, of Brazilian music but really belongs to the world. It's not just... His music transcends the spirit of place, it just goes... Yeah, we all love him, he's just a spirit.

06:30 MG: That's such a thing to say about someone, to transcend the spirit of the world, speaks a lot to who someone is.

06:37 WM: And I'm saying less than what he is. We got to get Hermeto on here to talk about him and play some of his music, I wish I could play some of his music. He's fantastic.

06:49 MG: If everyone has some time to go check out and to honor the great Hermeto Pascoal, he has a lot of music you can check out, so if you wanna just take some time to find some solace. And talking about solace, you have this really great interview in The New York Times today, and talking about the 10 things that have been on your mind, kept you going through the difficult times. Among those, it was beauty of jazz, justice for George Floyd, real solutions, Frederick Douglass and William Yates. Why don't if you can, those who haven't read the piece yet, tuning in right now, talk about some of those things, what they mean to you.

07:22 WM: Well, you know, you have some things that are touched on. Generally, they are things that tend to be from the past, and then you have things that you engage with right now that tends to be things that you are doing to use your contemporaries. Then you have things that you're looking way into the future on, like an example would be just the conversation we've had, like gifted it makes me smile just to think about him, because of who he is. And it could be a lot of our great younger musicians that... We have a lot of them that they can really play. And I love what they do. We've been online talking with them. It could be Riley or Joe Black. It's a crew that always makes me feel kinda happy about what's going on. Alexa, Giveton and Anthony Harvey and Jonah Moss, Philip Bell like younger than the age of my older, older, older kids. Early 20s, kind of 20s.

08:22 WM: So then you have your contemporaries like I just saw Spike Lee's film 'Da 5 Bloods', and Terence Blanchard wrote a masterful soundtrack, so I get to just a bit to tell him, "Yeah, man, I dug what you were doing, and I heard what you were doing." And we've known each other since the 1970s, 1972 or '73. And then you have people that are way out in... I've been looking at Martin Luther King's last speech at a National Cathedral. I talked about that one. I also read, I didn't look at it, but I'm gonna look at it. I read Lyndon Johnson's 1965 speech called, We Shall Overcome. Is the sometime that they called them because in that speech he says, "We shall overcome." And just the power of kind of president from the south saying the things that he said. So those are touched on things, and then, you have things that are epic, that's like Frederick Douglass, that's like something just timeless thoughts of humanity that you can just go back and to speak on meeting or the author of the book, David Blight and just see him and Geoff Ward talk.

09:33 WM: And then there's Hermeto, which is a force of nature, from the cosmos, just phew on earth. So to have a range of things that you can... It helps you to understand, or even when we did our gala to see Chucho playing the piano, and I think about that my father told me, in the early 70s he had first heard about Irakere from Cuba, and no we didn't went up to Cuba back at that time, he's like, "Man, this band from Cuba named Irakere," he was listening to their music. He goes, "Wooo!" He was co-signing him, talking about him, "Man, this dude can play, Chucho." And then Chucho, they sent me a picture of him and my father, and the picture was so soulful. Just... And I was thinking back, looking at the two of them, just... And I think my daddy was playing, and Chucho was just sitting next to him listening to it. And just the humanity in it. And I just think in a circular way about it, how when I first heard Chu, of course, now there's no Chucho, great master of years and also the kinda similar kind of heart that they... Chucho got a lot of heart. And it very... Just soul

drips off of him. He's a person that's very... He's in that number of the angels on earth. And all those kind of things help you, and yeah, it was fun doing that interview too, with The Times.

11:01 MG: And can you speak a little bit... I really, really resonated with me, specifically, was that talking about real solutions and real actions, and it things that you've been talking about your entire career, but specifically right now, even Supreme Court passing that important, you can't be discriminated against just because if you're part of the LGBTQ community. So if you can talk a little bit more about real solutions, what we can do now to be part of the democracy.

11:28 WM: Well, I think it's important for us to understand where the power is. What is the Federal power, and what is the local power? And these are not complicated concepts. But it's important for us, as citizens, to be engaged, it's important for us to get our eyes on it and not go with propaganda. So the Supreme Court passed two things, and then one they didn't comment on. They said, "We're not gonna hear it." And the thing that's interested about what they weren't gonna hear, is that of the two judges on the extreme, Sotomayor and Clarence Thomas, both said, "We need to look at it." And the rest of the courts said, "No, we don't need to look at it," and that was the very subject that the entire nation is out in the street protesting, and that is qualified immunity. So we have to be engaged.

12:19 WM: Okay, they don't have to look at that because of something that's really a local issue, but every signal, if the whole nation is out in the street talking about it, then you hit us with two very flashy and important decisions, both of which I agree with 100%, but over here we're protesting and he just slides up on the need to do with no comment. [chuckle] You got to watch stuff, and yet you just have to realize that you have opposition. It's not just everybody doesn't agree on this stuff. And democracy is about the back and forth in the battle, and to always remember, you don't have to have democracy. A military might is... You know, somebody can beat you. You lost. So to understand how to nurture that ground and the importance of the political solution and there are points of being engaged in the democracy and studying those local courts, getting involved with your local politics on the state, in the city level, and going to your council members and talking, is things I need to do. So I'm not talking to people, I'm talking to myself.

13:38 MG: And vote, everyone go out there and vote too obviously so important.

13:41 WM: Yeah, voting is one thing. It's the easiest thing we can do. Stand on a line and vote. Yes, that's easy. Even in the places where it's being made impossible to vote. The harder it is to vote, the more determined you have to be to vote. But get engaged, even talking about it, because I know at this time people are telling me, "Man, I'm tired of hearing about this politics, I'm tired of... I'm tired of..." Sometimes I get tired of hearing about stuff too, but this is what we're supposed to be about. I might be tired of it but am I too tired of hearing about it to wanna see equal employment, to see the end of ghettos, to see a vision where everybody can participate in the enormous wealth? Am I so tired of hearing about it, that I wanna abdicate my position and in speaking about it for other people, so we can all enjoy something? It's like you have a concept of your family doing well and mine not doing well means we aren't doing well. It's like being in a band with a sad rhythm section. "You guys, man, I'm playing my part, I'm..." No, if the rhythm section's not right, we are not right.

14:48 MG: It's a great way to put it and for people to know it's that concept to get, even if you're playing right and you're doing... You have to make sure that everyone is playing right, and you're all together with that.

15:00 WM: Right.

15:00 MG: And I wanna ask, I saw a question pop up talking about playing with people back when shows were still going on as they will in the future of course again. Do you ever get superstitious or have any superstitions before a big performance? Is there anything that you have to do?

15:20 WM: No, I just gotta put this brace on my back, so that my arthritis doesn't kill me. [laughter] I always laugh with Ryan when we get up on the stage, I said, "It's only two things that I'm most nervous about is, can I get up on the stage? And do we have a flight the next day?" So I'm not really superstitious about it. No, I mean it's been a blessing to play.

15:50 MG: Well, even on Skain's Domain this past Monday, you had a bunch of the JLCO members on. It was so great. I always have so much fun watching you all interact and talk with each other, and you've known each other for so long and varying levels of things... You must miss them so much.

16:06 WM: Yeah, I miss 'em. And you know we all do a kind of, when we talk to each other because we work on each other's music, we have a certain type of way back and forth. It's not always pleasant, but it's also just the mutual respect and of all the years of playing gigs under different circumstances and the pressures and also the ages everybody is at this time. Bands fluctuate, they come up and they come down. And for the older of us, we've been doing it a long time. Our older members, most of them are deceased, Joe Temperley being gone. And the earlier members, who were in the band, Jimmy Hamilton and Clark Terry, our mentors and the people we love, and now we see the younger ones coming up, like Chris and Carlos, they're young compared to us, and the kind of way the pride they have with it, and what they do with it.

16:54 WM: And even our younger ones going into the 30s like with Camille and Evan. To have Camille and Walter on the call at the same time because Camille came in because Walter was in China and now Walter is coming out. And Camille is not gonna be in the band, but still the spirit of her in which she has and which she brings to the band, and there's gonna be all kind of other things for her to do in the leadership position she will be in. And what it is, it's how natural it is and we don't have to... Kenny is talking. All the things the and years... We work on stuff in 1994, '95. Marcus, Ryan, we in touch with each other. With Ted, we were talking about arthritis yesterday.

[laughter]

17:39 MG: It's no joke, it's no joke and you gotta laugh but...

17:42 WM: It's not a joke if you have it. It's something you don't realize you're ever gonna have.

It's very simple, but it's very complicated. And we tease each other about we can't see the music or whatever it is. And it's a blessing. And they all are so serious and they're serious. So even on gigs or when something goes wrong, people are serious, they're like, "Man, I don't know how that gig felt to you all but..." But Carlos will be the first one calling me, "Hey papa, did you really look at this set list?" Or you know, just the attention to detail, [laughter] Yeah, people are serious. They're for real.

18:23 MG: And as you mentioned, you have this great respect and relationship with these musicians as you do with many musicians outside the JLCO too. What would be your suggestions for any musicians tuning in right now on how to find other musicians to connect with and to jam with and to play with? And maybe... You know when you connect with someone, but maybe the steps in doing that.

18:47 WM: Create space. It's like with any person. I had a lot of brothers when growing up, feels like six of us, and one of our brothers was autistic, so he would be doing all kind of stuff like banging his head into walls and we had never... We were kids, we were like... So first, I would be teasing my mom about something is wrong with my brother, and then it was something we'd never heard of called autism, and just like just... It's hard to explain. The space in the house became different. It was always... You know, me and my brother were in a room, three of them in another room, so it was... But just to kinda, over time you learn you have to want to create space.

19:32 WM: It's like wanting to create wealth for other people. I never forget one time, I was complaining about some food we had, this is a long time, we're struggling in our family, we had a couple of hard years. And it was something on my plate. I'm 13 months younger than my brother Branford, my older brother. And I was complaining about how I wanted more of something. So my brother took some off of his plate and he put it on my plate, like as a joke, but it was... And then when he put it on my plate, he looked at me and said "Now we have more." So I never forgot. I mean, I was maybe eight or nine and he was ten. And we laughed about it. I don't even know if I ate it, I might have got mad 'cause I didn't want to take it from him. But I never forgot the analogy of him, just saying "Sometimes more means you have less."

20:23 MG: Wow.

20:23 WM: And then there's more. So we have trouble with that as a philosophy. And I think with our band the one thing that's really different is we create space for each other. And at first it was hard. It's a struggle, you're not gonna see my solo twice. You may solo one time in the night, you may not solo. And you worked hard on your soloing. And you have your arrangement, we stopped... It's always been hard in rehearsals, we have to be howling and screaming and cussing to get people's attention and all of this. But now once we stopped playing each other's arrangements, when you stand in front of the band and you gotta cuss and scream for 20 minutes to get people to pay attention, is very different. After we got through all those arrangements, there's no cussing and screaming and all of that. Everybody is helping because it's their space.

21:18 MG: Make space.

21:18 WM: And I think also the honesty that we deal with each other with sometimes. But we also have writer ways, like if you arrange a composition, you have the writer way. Like Dan Nimmer, Dan is the nicest person in the world. Dan would always say...

21:31 MG: Prove it.

21:32 WM: But me and Ali had a bet one time about Dan, I said "If I tell Dan to change this section he's not gonna change it." So I said "Dan, I think you should take this three/four section and put it in." He said "No, no, no, three/four." He don't even entertain it. No, no, no three, four. Oh, you know, the different things we know we have. When we work with each other, we all have to... We all work out our things. The arranger, the composer, they have the writer way. And we're gonna play it the way they want it to be played.

22:05 MG: And that's respect. That's right, you respect and space and caring.

22:10 WM: Yeah, you learn to respect through doing it.

22:12 MG: Mm-hmm.

22:13 WM: Not through saying you're gonna do it.

22:16 MG: Right.

22:17 WM: It's nothing between me and Marcus Printup, he always wants to play like something that has a back-beat on it, but he knows... [chuckle] I played so much back-beat music when I was in high school, I'm always like "Man, no back-beat," he will be like "Back-beat." But that's part of the respect. It's his arrangement, he wants it to be played that way, that's the way let's play it.

22:38 MG: And that's a beautiful thing. And I saw an interesting question come through asking, have you ever ever thought about playing music for and people that are incarcerated?

22:53 WM: I have done that. And yes, I want to get a project of teaching the spirituals in the quiet tradition into the prisons, but as a matter of fact, the only time my mama ever wrote me because of something that was online. I played with some guys on Rahway prison. She never wrote to me... This one time. She said, okay, you're doing something now. You're doing something now. So yeah, definitely, I played in the prison system. And it's something I was interested in doing in the 1980s. So we need more, I wish I could really get that spiritual project off the ground. Because I think you would hear something and it would also be instructional on a certain level.

23:43 MG: As you're talking about before, it's the community, that chorus of people, right, that's what it's all about and that all together.

23:49 WM: In actuality the lady that called me to start Jazz at Lincoln Center, Alina Bloomgarden,

now works with an organization called Music On The Inside, and it's about music in the prison system. And I'm supposed to be working with her I'm not doing a good job right now. Just was overwhelmed with stuff. But she's a community, she is so free and I love her. And I know they're doing fantastic work. And we need to do more and I need to do more.

24:20 MG: Well that's an exciting project that looks like that will be on the horizon, hopefully coming soon to continue that collaboration. And I saw another comment come in about talking about improvisation, people that are in the beginning of improv, and I see a lot of these comments actually. Any tips on how to do improv, I know that's kind of a hard thing, but any, any tips or tricks?

24:44 WM: The first thing is to accept that it is easy. That's number one, okay? It is easy. It's like you want to learn a language. If you say "Well, I want to know how to speak French," well, learn four or five words first. That's not hard. Now it's hard to be fluent. But it's not difficult to go through the slow steps of developing. Now with music it's even easier, because it's just sing melodies and play them. Start with very simple songs. Play those songs and then add to them a note or two. Start with nursery rhymes and just add a note or two. And it could be anything, "Mary Had a Little Lamb", "Row, row, row your boat".

[vocalization]

25:28 WM: Mickey Mouse. I mean, and just... The blues is always there for you to learn how to play. It's a form that's easy to hear, you can play a pentatonic scale on it.

[vocalization]

25:44 WM: Now the thing about improvisation, you want to play it in the context of some type of rhythm, if it's in jazz. So you can put a metronome or anything, you can record yourself on your phone doing what I'm doing.

26:00 WM: And just play that and play on top of it. Learn the baseline of a blues, and just play those root notes.

[vocalization]

26:15 WM: And just play on top of it. You can sing that into your phone and play on top of that progression, or you can get any of these apps that have rhythm sections and start playing. And I'm telling you you'll figure stuff out to play. But if you go the theoretical route and start learning all this complicated stuff, you'll never play. You will never learn how to play doing that. It's like you're not gonna go to a baby and start teaching them what a gerund is. A noun goes here before the verb. Whatever, if they're babbling, you say, "Yeah!" You talking to them, and when they figure out one word, wow! They just said, "Technology." You're gonna make up some word the child said, and you're gonna make a big deal out of it, and you're encouraging them every step of the way. Whereas with this sometimes with jazz improvisation, it's like you take the people out of their ear space into

their brain space. You don't wanna be in your brain space 'cause you'll never figure that out.

27:12 MG: It feels like it gets stuck in there.

27:16 WM: There's too much to process thinking about. It's super thought. It's greater than thought. It's hearing and hearing is close to instinct. You know how you see the animals in the wild sometimes. It's something, right? Well, the instinct is before they do that. The instinct is going down to... That's what you play in. You play in a time this before gestures. And many times it's hard to explain what that time is.

27:45 MG: It sounds like you'll learn to know that. Once you know...

27:49 WM: I was speaking with a friend of mine that had a brain injury. And just when we were talking, she's trying to figure out how to talk again. And it was the most fascinating thing looking at her look for words. It was like playing, because every time she was saying something, I was trying to anticipate what she would say, but she said, "Do not anticipate." That's part of the things 'cause you wanna feel the end of a sentence. Don't fill the end of it. Don't anticipate it, stay on the edge of that thought. So you're looking and you're trying to feel the thought, the intention. You start to listen for different things than words. And the whole time I was just kinda following what she was saying and trying to... And then I thought, "Man, why is it something about this... It's satisfying, even though I know she struggling to talk?" And I didn't want her to stop, I was kept like... Then I realized, "Wow, it's like playing!" Because when you listening to people playing, you always, "What's coming? What are they saying?" You always kinda... You're on the edge of that moment trying to... Then once it's gone, that's it. You can't...

28:54 MG: Once that moment's gone... That's wow! That's a really deep, beautiful...

29:00 WM: 'Cause there's a lot of things going on. Yeah, you remember it's not your playing and everybody's playing. Whoever you're playing with, "Carlos play something." And you know they're thinking of something too. Now you, and then you listening is... That's the most fascinating thing about the music is the collective creativity when it's good.

29:18 MG: And there's more than one person, it's everybody, you're right.

29:20 WM: Specially when you have motion in the bass, when the bass is static, something has to add something to make it less. I don't know what it is. It's just something about when the bass is static, you have one less moving voice. 'Cause you... It's interesting. No wonder the drums and the Batá drums... I need to call Pedrito and get my other lesson. I know I should know what the drum is. I don't know if it's the itotele, one of the drums is the slave, they call it the slave because it plays the same part over over again. And I was thinking about when you play the same thing, it's hard to have the discipline to play the same part. Don't get me wrong. The funkiest bass players always could just play the same baseline in a very simple way. It's not something easy to do. But once you lose that motion in the bottom for that type of playing that I'm talking about, it becomes very different.

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30:10 MG: Well, thank you for sharing that. That was really the beautiful little piece of knowledge right there, I think that can really resonate with a lot of people tuning in. And I wanna mention to everyone tuning in, thank you so much. We're gonna wrap things up. It's about the end here. I wanna thank everyone so much for tuning in and as always, you can head to jazz.org. We have programming seven days a week, virtually online, you don't have to leave your house for education classes, streaming concerts from artist's homes. We have full content that we're putting on our YouTube page and on our Facebook page. So check that out and we hope you can join us. And Wynton again as always, my favorite day of the week, Wednesday, thank you for coming on and talking.

30:49 WM: You know, come on Maddy, it's good to see you, as always. Thank you, thank you so much and thank you all.

30:55 MG: Have a good one and I'll see you next week.

30:57 WM: All right now. Take care.