

## INTRODUCTION

This is the story of trumpeter Wynton Learson Marsalis, who rose to become one of the most famous and influential jazz and classical musicians in the modern world. When he was only 22 years old, he became the first jazz musician to win Grammy awards in both jazz and classical music. Grammys are the highest awards in the recording industry. Before he was 30, Wynton became artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, the most prestigious arts center in the world. At age 36, he won the Pulitzer Prize, the highest award given to artists in America—and it was the first time a Pulitzer went to a jazz musician. Supposedly it was for his jazz oratorio, *Blood on the Fields*, a work combining words and music and inspired by the history of slavery. But actually the Pulitzer recognized all the good work Wynton had done during his career.



*In 1984, Wynton won a Grammy for "Best Jazz Instrumental Performance, Soloist."*

These accomplishments may seem to indicate that Wynton has lived a charmed life, but he has worked hard to win his honors. He has endured much more than his fair share of criticism. Some of it came from people who did not share his traditional taste in music. Other critics simply had

less vision than Wynton. And some people envied him because no one else in jazz history has ever been so rich, famous, and praised so early in life.

Wynton has handled all his challenges by concentrating on his work. He has the strength of character to work harder and longer hours than nearly anyone else and to inspire others to follow his example. His father, Ellis Marsalis, Jr., a well-known jazz pianist and teacher in New Orleans—Wynton's hometown—has been a wonderful role model and advisor for

Wynton and his brothers. Learning from his father, Wynton developed the desire to spread the word about the greatness and grandeur of jazz. And above all else in life, he

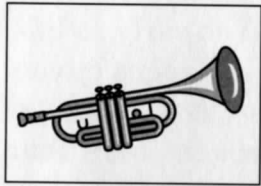
has always loved to play music. As he once told a journalist, "When I play the trumpet, all my troubles disappear." These passions are the secret of his success.

---

**"When I play the trumpet, all my troubles disappear."**

---

CHAPTER ONE



**WYNTON SETS OUT ON HIS OWN**

In 1978, when Wynton Marsalis graduated from high school in New Orleans, Louisiana, he looked like an ordinary, slender, 17-year-old adolescent. He usually wore blue jeans, heavy-rimmed glasses, and a big Afro that bounced when he walked. But he had already won a number of awards for his trumpet playing. He was the first African-American to win first prize in an important competition. It opened doors for him to play in several classical music orchestras in New Orleans. And he had decided to go North to study trumpet. His elder brother, Branford, a saxophonist, had

already left home to study in Boston.

**“I just loved to play the trumpet.”**

When Wynton was 12 years old, he started practicing the trumpet—morning, noon, and night.



*Wynton impressed his teachers ever since he was in junior high school.*

The exercises were difficult and boring, but they improved his playing. Wynton’s technique became astounding. “I just loved to play the trumpet,” he said. He and Branford had led a funk group for dances and parties throughout their teen years.