Wynton Marsalis

The most acclaimed jazz musician and composer of his generation and a distinguished classical performer, Wynton Marsalis has by force of personality, intelligence, and achievement brought jazz back to center stage in American culture.

Born October 18, 1961 in New Orleans, the second of six sons of Dolores and Ellis Marsalis, Wynton Marsalis began studying trumpet seriously at age 12. During high school, he performed in local marching bands, jazz bands, funk bands, and classical orchestras, and at age 18 he moved to New York to attend the Julliard School. In the summer of 1980 he became a member of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, and that same year signed with Columbia Records. Since his self-titled debut was released in 1982, Marsalis has recorded over 30 jazz and classical albums for Columbia and for Sony Classical, and has made guest appearances on countless others. He has taken his jazz groups to thirty countries on six continents, performing more than 120 concerts per year for each of the past fifteen years. Marsalis disbanded his septet at the end of 1994, and over the next few years plans to concentrate on writing music, studying composition, and further honing his skills on trumpet.

Marsalis serves as Artistic Director for the internationally recognized Jazz at Lincoln Center program, which he cofounded in 1987. Under Wynton's leadership, the Jazz Department earned the distinction of being named Lincoln Center's first new constituent since 1969. Several commissioned works for the program are among his most recent successes as a composer. "Blood on the Fields", his epic oratorio on slavery, won the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for music. Marsalis is the first jazz composer ever to earn a Pulitzer, a distinction that for five decades had been awarded exclusively to classical composers.

Education is a priority for Marsalis. One of the most successful aspects of the Jazz at Lincoln Center program has been Marsalis' Saturday "Jazz for Young People" series, which has become a favorite for New Yorkers. While on the road with his bands and with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, Marsalis regularly conducts master classes in local schools, and spends hours tutoring students who reach out to him.

Marsalis has been awarded the Grand Prix du Disque of France, the Edison Award of the Netherlands, and was elected an Honorary Member of England's Royal Academy of Music, in addition to recieving eight Grammy awards for his jazz and classical recordings. In recognition of the many hours he has contributed to music education, community organizations and charities, he has been given keys to cities across the country, all types of community service awards, and a Congressional citation. In May of 1997 he recieved honorary doctorate degrees from Rutgers University, Amherst College, Howard University, and Long Island University; these honors were added to the list of colleges and universities which have recognized him, including Yale, Princeton, Brown, Columbia, John Hopkins, Brandeis, Manhattan School of Music, and University of Miami. He spoke at the National Press Club in November 1995, and was profiled by "60 Minutes" that December. He has been the subject of cover stories for Life Magazine, Time Magazine, Parade, Sunday New York Times Magazine, Sunday Los Angeles Times Calender, London Times Magazine, and Esquire (UK), as well as numerous appearances on the covers of JazzTimes, Downbeat, and Jazziz. In 1996, Time Magazin named him among America's 25 Most Influential People.