



# Wynton Marsalis



**Wynton Marsalis** is an internationally acclaimed musician, composer, bandleader, educator and a leading advocate of American culture. He is the world's first jazz artist to perform and compose across the full jazz spectrum from its New Orleans roots to bebop to modern jazz. By creating and performing an expansive range of brilliant new music for quartets to big bands, chamber music ensembles to symphony orchestras, tap dance to ballet, Wynton has expanded the vocabulary for jazz and created a vital body of work that places him among the world's finest musicians and composers.

## Early Years

Wynton was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on October 18, 1961, to Ellis and Dolores Marsalis, the second of six sons. At age eight Wynton performed traditional New Orleans music in the Fairview Baptist Church band and at 14 he performed with the New Orleans Philharmonic, New Orleans Symphony Brass Quintet, New Orleans Community Concert Band, New Orleans Youth Orchestra, New Orleans Symphony, various jazz bands and with the popular local funk band, the Creators.

At age 17 Wynton became the youngest musician ever to be admitted to Tanglewood's Berkshire Music Center. Despite his youth, he was awarded the school's prestigious **Harvey Shapiro Award** for outstanding brass student. Wynton moved to New York City to attend Juilliard in 1979. In 1980 Wynton seized the opportunity to join the Jazz Messengers to study under master drummer and bandleader Art Blakey. It was from Blakey that Wynton acquired his concept for bandleading and for bringing intensity to each and every performance. In the years to follow Wynton performed with Sarah Vaughan, Dizzy Gillespie, Sweets Edison, Clark Terry, Sonny Rollins, Ron Carter, Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams and countless other jazz legends.

Wynton assembled his own band in 1981 and hit the road, performing over 120 concerts every year for 15 consecutive years. With the power of his superior musicianship, the infectious sound of his swinging bands and an exhaustive series of performances and music workshops, Marsalis rekindled widespread interest in jazz throughout the world. Students of Marsalis' workshops include: James Carter, Christian McBride, Roy Hargrove, Harry Connick Jr., Nicholas Payton, Eric Reed and Eric Lewis, to name a few.

## Classical Career

At the age of 20, Wynton recorded the Haydn, Hummel and Leopold Mozart trumpet concertos. His debut recording received glorious reviews and won the **Grammy Award® for "Best Classical Soloist with an Orchestra."** Marsalis went on to record 10 additional classical records, all to critical acclaim. Wynton performed with leading orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Pops, The Cleveland Orchestra, Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra and London's Royal Philharmonic, working with an eminent group of conductors including: Leppard, Dutoit, Maazel, Slatkin, Salonen and Tilson-Thomas. Famed classical trumpeter Maurice André praised Wynton as "potentially the greatest trumpeter of all time."

## The Composer

To date Wynton has produced over 70 records which have sold over seven million copies worldwide including three Gold Records. Marsalis' rich and expansive body of music places him among the world's most significant composers. He has been commissioned to create new music for several dance companies including: Garth Fagan, Peter Martins at the New York City Ballet, Twyla Tharp with the American Ballet Theatre, Judith Jamison at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, and Savion Glover. Marsalis collaborated with the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society in 1995 to compose the string quartet *At The Octoroon Balls*, and again in 1998 to create a response to Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Tale* with his composition *A Fiddler's Tale*. With his collection of standards arrangements (Standard Time Volumes I-VI), Wynton reconnected audiences with the beauty of the American popular song. He re-introduced the joy in New Orleans jazz with his recording *The Majesty Of The Blues*. He extended the jazz musician's interplay with the blues in *Levee Low Moan*, *Thick In The South* and other blues recordings. With *Citi Movement*, *In This House On This Morning* and *Blood On The Fields*, Wynton invented a fresh conception for extended form compositions. His inventive interplay with melody, harmony and rhythm, along with his lyrical voicing and tonal coloring assert new possibilities for the jazz ensemble. The *New York Times Magazine* said *Blood On The Fields* marked the symbolic moment when the full heritage of the line, Ellington through Mingus, was extended into the present."

The San Francisco Examiner stated, “Marsalis’ orchestral arrangements are magnificent. Duke Ellington’s shadings and themes come and go but Marsalis’ free use of dissonance, counter rhythms and polyphonics is way ahead of Ellington’s mid-century era.” Wynton extended his achievements in *Blood On The Fields* with *All Rise*, an epic composition for big band, gospel choir, and symphony orchestra which was performed by the New York Philharmonic under the baton of Kurt Masur along with the Morgan State University Choir and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (December 1999). Marsalis collaborated with Ghanaian master drummer Yacub Addy to create *Congo Square*, a groundbreaking composition combining elegant harmonies from America’s jazz tradition with fundamental rituals in African percussion and vocals (2006). For the anniversary of the Abyssinian Baptist Church’s 200th year of service, Marsalis blended Baptist choir cadences with blues accents and big band swing rhythms to compose *Abyssinian 200: A Celebration*, which was performed by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and Abyssinian’s 100 voice choir before packed houses in New York City (May 2008). In the fall of 2009 the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra premiered Marsalis’ composition *Blues Symphony*. Marsalis further expanded his repertoire for symphony orchestra with *Swing Symphony*, premiered by the renowned Berlin Philharmonic in June 2010. The New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Barbican have all signed on to perform *Swing Symphony*.

### **Television, Radio, Books**

In the fall of 1995 Wynton launched two major PBS broadcast events: Marsalis On Music, an educational television series on jazz and classical music, and the 26-week series entitled Making the Music. These entertaining and insightful radio shows were the first full exposition of jazz music in American broadcast history. Wynton’s radio and television series were awarded the most prestigious distinction in broadcast journalism, the **George Foster Peabody Award**. Marsalis has also written five books: Sweet Swing Blues on the Road, Jazz in the Bittersweet Blues of Life, To a Young Musician: Letters from the Road, Jazz ABZ, and his most recent release Moving to Higher Ground: How Jazz Can Change Your Life.

### **Awards and Accolades**

Wynton Marsalis has won nine **Grammy Awards®** and in 1983 he became the only artist ever to win **Grammy Awards®** for both jazz and classical records. He repeated the distinction by winning jazz and classical **Grammy Awards®** again in 1984. Today Wynton is the only artist ever to win **Grammy Awards®** in five consecutive years (1983-1987). Honorary degrees have been conferred upon Wynton by over 25 of America’s leading academic institutions including Columbia, Harvard, Howard, Princeton and Yale. Time magazine selected Wynton as one of America’s most promising leaders under age 40 in 1995, and in 1996 Time celebrated Marsalis as one of America’s 25 most influential people. In November 2005 Wynton Marsalis received **The National Medal of Arts**, the highest award given to artists by the United States Government.

In 1997 Wynton Marsalis became the first jazz musician ever to win the **Pulitzer Prize for Music** for his epic oratorio *Blood On*

*The Fields*. During the five preceding decades the Pulitzer Prize jury refused to recognize jazz musicians and their improvisational music, reserving this distinction for classical composers. In the years following Marsalis’ award, the **Pulitzer Prize for Music** has been awarded posthumously to Duke Ellington, George Gershwin, Thelonious Monk and John Coltrane.

Wynton’s creativity has been celebrated throughout the world. He won the Netherlands’ **Edison Award** and the **Grand Prix Du Disque** of France. The Mayor of Vitoria, Spain, awarded Wynton with the city’s **Gold Medal** – its most coveted distinction. Britain’s senior conservatoire, the Royal Academy of Music, granted Mr. Marsalis **Honorary Membership**, the Academy’s highest decoration for a non-British citizen (1996). The city of Marciac, France, erected a bronze statue in his honor. The French Ministry of Culture appointed Wynton the rank of **Knight in the Order of Arts and Literature** and in the fall of 2009 Wynton received France’s highest distinction, the insignia **Chevalier of the Legion of Honor**, an honor that was first awarded by Napoleon Bonaparte.

### **Jazz at Lincoln Center**

In 1987 Wynton Marsalis co-founded, and became Artistic Director for Jazz at Lincoln Center and Music Director for the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. In July 1996, due to its significant success, Jazz at Lincoln Center was installed as new constituent of Lincoln Center, equal in stature with the New York Philharmonic, Metropolitan Opera, and New York City Ballet - a historic moment for jazz as an art form and for Lincoln Center as a cultural institution. In October 2004, with the assistance of a dedicated Board and staff, Marsalis opened Frederick P. Rose Hall, the world’s first institution for jazz. Under Wynton’s leadership, Jazz at Lincoln Center has developed an international agenda presenting rich and diverse programming that includes concerts, debates, film forums, dances, television and radio broadcasts, and educational activities.

### **Giving Back**

Wynton Marsalis has devoted his life to uplifting populations worldwide with the egalitarian spirit of jazz. Immediately following Hurricane Katrina, Wynton organized the **Higher Ground Hurricane Relief Concert** and raised over \$3 million for musicians and cultural organizations impacted by the hurricane. At the same time, he assumed a leadership role on the **Bring Back New Orleans Cultural Commission** where he was instrumental in shaping a master plan that would revitalize the city’s cultural base. Wynton Marsalis has selflessly donated his time and talent to non-profit organizations throughout the country to raise money to meet the many needs within our society. From **My Sister’s Place** (a shelter for battered women) to **Graham Windham** (a shelter for homeless children), the **Children’s Defense Fund**, **Amnesty International**, the **Sloan Kettering Cancer Institute**, **Food For All Seasons** (a food bank for the elderly and disadvantaged), **Very Special Arts** (provides experiences in dance, drama, literature, and music for individuals with physical and mental disabilities) to the **Newark Boys Chorus School** (an academic music school for disadvantaged youths) and many, many more. It is Wynton Marsalis’ commitment to the improvement of life for all people that portrays the best of his character and humanity.