

Farrill and Santos lead LCJO in Latin jazz concerts

By Miriam Sa'uda Perez

Living music legends Chico O'Farrill and Ray Santos were the special guest conductors at Lincoln Center this month, during a music series that lasted three days and celebrated the Afro-Hispanic influence in jazz.

O'Farrill and Santos took turns leading the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (LCJO) in *Con Alma* - *The Latin Tinge* in Big Band Jazz, which blended the sounds of North American brass with the Latin American rhythms of timbales and congas. There were about 12 songs performed at each of the two-hour performances, which were held at the Center's Alice Tully Hall.

The Spanish Tinge, as it was called by jazz theorist Jelly Roll Morton, is a music pattern that is accented by African rhythms. A symphonic element, the tinge has been a main ingredient in some tunes by Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington and John Coltrane. The sound of the tinge was so powerful that some audience members were dancing in the aisles while others screamed praises at the orchestra from their seats.

Ray Santos is probably best known for his Oscar-nominated arrangements in the 1992 movie *The Mambo Kings*. Like the captain of a ship, Santos stood in front of the orchestra leading them in the performance of "Sunny Ray", a quick-paced tune that he wrote for the movie. The conga beat was carefully woven into the humming of the saxophones, trumpets and trombones.

Santos, who has worked with such artists as Tito Puente, Tony Bennett and Linda Ronstadt is one of the leaders of modern Latin music. After spending 40 years as a performer, arranger and composer, Santos

said he had finally fulfilled his dream of sharing the stage with O'Farrill.

An icon in Latin jazz, O'Farrill looked small and unsteady as he stood in front of the 20-piece orchestra, but as he lifted his arms and the music began to play, it was obvious that his seasoned ear had only increased his conducting ability. One of the highlights of the concert was when he conducted the orchestra in "Manteca Suite", a unique, mellow composition he arranged for Dizzy Gillespie. O'Farrill, who has been performing with artists such as Machito, Gillespie and Benny Goodman since the



Marsalis and his trumpet took a back seat in the orchestra when Chico O'Farrill and Ray Santos did the guest conducting honors.

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1940s, received a standing ovation at the end of the concert as he conducted the final composition, "Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite".

The concerts also included jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, who serves as the artistic director for the LCJO. At one concert, Marsalis, an artist of both classical and jazz music, performed his tune, "Habenara: from

Jump Start". Seated in the back row of the orchestra, the last in a line of three other horn blowers, his own instrument appeared dull in comparison to the other polished trumpets. Yet Marsalis, his solos filled with long sharp riffs, hit all of the high and low notes and gave a performance that set the tone for the orchestra to follow.

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Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis keeps watch over his Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra.