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Photographs by Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times

From left, Wynton Marsalis and Herlin Riley; Ray Charles; B. B. King and Eric Clapton; and Audra McDonald, on Monday at the Apollo Theater in "Blowin' the Blues Away," a benefit for Jazz at Lincoln Center.

MUSIC REVIEW

They Got the Ol' TV Documentary Blues

By KELEFA SANNEH

How do you pay tribute to the blues? How do you capture the music's restless spirit, its bitter wit, its elegiac grace, its raunchy energy?

The organizers of "Blowin' the

Blues Away: A Gala Evening Celebrating the Blues and Jazz" decided to trust the music. On Monday night the Apollo Theater held a concert that took its shape from the most vibrant expression of the blues today: the television documentary.

The concert, a benefit for Jazz at Lincoln Center, succeeded, thanks in

large part to the star performer, Laurence Fishburne, whose smooth, rich voice evoked the great voice-over narrators of old. If you sat back in your seat and closed your eyes, it was easy to feel as if you'd been transported ... to your own sofa, in front of the television set.

The soundtrack was supplied by

the Wynton Marsalis Septet, which nimbly brought to life blues and blues-inflected pieces from throughout the century. The ensemble sounded especially impressive during a run through Ornette Coleman's jagged, asymmetrical "Ramblin'," bending the notes a little further to emphasize the blues connection. In

case anyone had doubts, Mr. Fishburne stepped up to vouch for Mr. Coleman's blues credentials: "Even his most demanding compositions are anchored in the blues."

There was a full slate of guest stars, too, many who have reached that stage of eminence when they don't play concerts anymore — just benefits and tributes.

Out came Eric Clapton, strapping on an acoustic guitar for a charming, spindly version of Louis Armstrong's "I'm Not Rough," and no one laughed when he moaned, "It takes a

brown-skinned woman to satisfy my mind." (When Mr. Clapton was done, Mr. Fishburne assured the audience that "the blues, they belong to everyone.")

Out came B. B. King, who did more mugging than playing, and who didn't seem totally comfortable collaborating with Mr. Marsalis's jazz band; he seemed a bit more comfortable when Mr. Marsalis brought out Mr. Clapton for the inevitable duet.

Out came Ray Charles, who contributed the night's most bizarre,

Continued on Page 5