

# Jazz at Lincoln Center with Wynton Marsalis



By Stephan  
Rose

Ready for this bombshell? I don't like jazz. Never have. Oh, I respect jazz, but I've never liked it. As a musician for the past 20-plus years, I know it takes a superior ability to play that style of music, and it is complex as all get-out. It's just that I've never liked it; seems a little too "busy" for my taste. However, that all changed earlier this month when my mind was opened by a performance at the Zeiterion Theater by Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, featuring seven-time Grammy award winner Wynton Marsalis.

The show was two-hours of non-stop excitement! The 15-piece orchestra tore through everything from 85-year-old compositions by Duke Ellington to new music written by their bassist. When a band-leader boasts that they are going to play a piece that has never been performed by any other orchestra besides the original because it's simply too complex, you know you are witnessing some serious talent! I found myself enjoying every selection, with my favorites being the Latin-tinged pieces where the group was augmented by a conga and a timbale player.



Wynton Marsalis playing trumpet.

Wynton Marsalis was the ultimate host. He made a special effort to let us know who composed each piece, giving numerous credits to the oft-unsung Billy Strayhorn, including right before performing Strayhorn's astounding piece, "Lush Life". He even gave the mic to his bass-player, Carlos Henriquez, so that Henriquez could introduce a composition he himself wrote, and explain it's origins.

Gifted with a warm, low voice, Marsalis told entertaining stories throughout the evening, along with some really funny jokes. When a heckler called out something Wynton couldn't understand, he responded with, "Could you yell that out again? I couldn't understand it...sounded good, whatever it was." Even his less-entertaining asides ended with a laugh. The only time during the entire show that he seemed to be droning on (to give his fellow musicians time to prepare for the next song), he ended with, "I have no idea what I'm talking about!"

Wynton introduced all the members of Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra to the audience, causing some laughter when he repeatedly named one of the saxophonists who played so well that night. His eagerness to share the spotlight with his fellow musicians, along with his musical ability, makes Marsalis the embodiment of the phrase, "Modesty plus immense talent equals genius."

Every single musician had a chance to shine during the show. Most had several solos, while the ones who didn't played amazingly well in their own right. I thought some of the notes the trumpet players were hitting might tear a hole in the fabric of space-time, but no, the universe remained safe. Good thing, since I have so much more living to do!



photo credit: Anthony Barboza

## The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra

After two hours, Wynton thanked us and left the stage. We made a special effort to ensure our cheers were loud enough and long enough to be worthy of such a great performance. Wynton thanked us by returning to the stage for a generous 15-minute encore. This time, he was leading a five-piece arrangement. The smaller group led to a more intimate feel, with Wynton and another trumpet player walking the stage.

Yes, the night was magical, and everyone involved in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra was eminently talented. There was no downside to the evening, so stop looking for a “but.”

Okay, if you really want one, here it is: I never liked jazz before BUT Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra changed that!

I think it's time to learn some new jazz chords....