

STAGEBILL

OCTOBER 1998



LINCOLN CENTER

Thursday Evening, October 15, 1998, at 8:00

Saturday Evening, October 17, 1998, at 8:00

J@ZZ Lincoln Center

Wynton Marsalis, *Artistic Director*

Rob Gibson, *Executive Producer & Director*

Jazz at Lincoln Center is supported by Discover® Card.

AS OF NOW

featuring newly-commissioned compositions by
Charles McPherson and Wallace Roney

"Jump Street Suite"

Charles McPherson, *composer and alto saxophone*

James Zollar, *trumpet*

Vincent Gardner, *trombone*

Bill Easley, *clarinet and tenor saxophone*

Benny Green, *piano*

Rufus Reid, *bass*

Chuck McPherson, *drums*

"Neu Beings"

Wallace Roney, *composer and trumpet*

Antoine Roney, *tenor and soprano saxophones and bass clarinet*

Adam Holzman, *keyboards*

Robert Lee Irving III, *piano and keyboards*

Robert Trowers, *trombone*

James Spaulding, *alto saxophone*

Mino Cinelu, *percussion*

Buster Williams, *bass*

Lenny White, *drums*

As of Now is a new program produced by Jazz at Lincoln Center that pairs veteran jazz musicians and rising artists. A new work from each artist was commissioned by Jazz at Lincoln Center and premieres on October 15, 1998, in Alice Tully Hall.

ALICE TULLY HALL

Home of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Notes on the Program

AS OF NOW: FOR THE FIRST TIME AGAIN

This new series of concert presentations is what Jazz at Lincoln Center has been doing since its inception. It has always been our idea was to vastly improve the quality of jazz presentation and to bring together, whenever possible, younger musicians and older musicians, something that has basic to the development of the idiom and has been true of the experience of almost every major figure in the art. In the golden past—which is never as far nor as close as anyone remembers—aspiring jazz musicians had played in big bands under the leadership of veterans; they had backed up blues and jazz singers; they had played private parties and packed ballrooms where the beat and the meat came together on the dance floor; they had functioned as sidemen who were groomed by older, more experienced artists, who showed them the way around the art they were devoting themselves to, note by note, rhythm by rhythm.

Wynton Marsalis has appeared on the stage of Alice Tully Hall with Doc Cheatham and Harry "Sweets" Edison, Benny Carter was commissioned to write a piece for Milt Jackson and Bobby Hutcherson, two major figures of the vibraphone from different generations who, in the first half of the concert, appeared opposite each other. Further, when the music of Jelly Roll Morton was performed, Marsalis, Marcus Roberts, and Michael White shared the bandstand with Danny Barker, who had known Morton when he was around eighty years old. The same has been true of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, which now tours the world with a thick repertoire of jazz across eras. This has been a central aspect of our programming. We continue to develop it.

This particular series takes its title from the fact that all musicians, elder or younger, are working in the present. No previous time and no future time actually exists—as Wallace Shawn's character Jack emphasizes in *The Designated Mourner*, "Where are

they?" he asks. Well, they are either gone, second by second, the present suddenly becoming the past and the future suddenly consumed by the present. Both remain only in memory or in feeling or in the design of recognition we call thinking. The wonder of art is that it allows all aspects of time to have equal presence—the past, the present, the future. In this aspect of our concert presentations, "As of Now," we would like our audiences to get a glimpse of the present, of memories and dreams, as they arrive in the work of two musicians from different generations and, perhaps, different schools, both functioning within the aesthetic frame of jazz, which invariably addresses 4/4 swing (fast, medium, and slow), the blues, the romantic or meditative ballad, and Afro-Hispanic rhythms. Each school of the music interprets those elements differently, but no important direction in this art has ever been set by players who duck those basics.

In order to do what they will do, the artists brought to the stage in this series have been commissioned to write music because encouraging composition is a central concern of Jazz at Lincoln Center. What might only be a performance by two different generations of players has the added aspect of something freshly conceived for this particular occasion. As with all that is done by Jazz at Lincoln Center, adequate rehearsal time is provided so that the musicians and the audience get the best possible version of the composition, since there is nothing more frustrating for the performer or the audience than to find themselves in the middle of a performance so poorly executed due to lack of preparation that the essence of the composing disappears into a set of overshadowing mistakes. Giving someone enough time to get the job done is a form of respect for the artist, the art itself, and the audience. That is at the essence of the sense of community that we hope to realize in every aspect of Jazz at Lincoln Center.

This evening, we are quite happy to present two artists who have quite rightfully developed reputations among their peers and have worked quite diligently at expand-

ing upon what touched them most deeply. In the case of Charles McPherson, the central influence was Charlie Parker. As Wallace Roney says of Miles Davis, "I'm his biggest fan." But what each of them has done is of signal importance to how this art works, which is the way any other one works. No matter what you start with, the question is what you make of your influences. McPherson has become one of the most impressive alto saxophonists of this era and any other. He is also a composer whose works go far beyond what we associate with the bebop school that he is far too glibly locked into by those who have not paid close enough attention to what the saxophonist actually does. While he has developed his own searing, rhythmically complex and daring voice as an improviser, one cannot discount the years of performing with Charles Mingus, which provided him with examples of many different ways to organize and extend upon compositional materials. The same is true of Roney, who has his own sound and is exploring a variety of contexts and a number of ways of organizing music that are quite exciting and adventurous, drawing upon both complex and simple harmonies, direct and intricate rhythms, short and long forms.

The musicians themselves have enough to say about their new works to inform us of what they are ready to do tonight.

Charles McPherson says of his work, "The title of my piece is *Jump Street*. Basically, you can think of it as a suite, actually, with some movements. It is all connected and lasts about forty-five minutes. All of the elements are there that are necessary to create an overall impact on the audience, which is what I want. This is not something that I usually do, so I do have a little bit of the jitters. But this is a good thing to have because that is what lets you know that you are going into some new territory. That kind of feeling is something that returns you to the sort of excitement and seriousness that you had at the start, back when you were a kid trying to learn how to play correctly, when you weren't absolutely sure but knew that you had to be absolutely concentrated on what you

were doing. Otherwise—disaster. At this point, as a professional who has studied with Barry Harris and has worked with Mingus and has heard so many great musicians, I have the chance to bring together everything that has added up for me.

"So, in *Jump Street*, I've worked at making sure that things are not incongruous. Basically, I visualize a neighborhood. The movements in the piece and the emotionality of it are devised to create the phases of a day in an urban situation with different ethnic groups jammed up together, something like in New York City. So you have the opening title piece, there is *Illusions in Blue*, *Waltz of the Hipsters*, *Bebop to Hip-hop*, *Horizons*. I'm still working on the order for the optimum effect. But each part is there for a reason. Here are couple of examples of what I'm talking about. *Waltz of the Hipsters* is a picture of the street guys, the pimps, hustlers, and those kinds of people. It's not a simple thing. This is an involved work that makes use of more than the conventional lengths and expectations. *Bebop to Hip-hop* is about those guys running around with their pants falling off, rapping, and going through all of that. Not in their style but in my style of looking at it.

"There is also a clear reason why I have included an arrangement of a familiar piece. In this particular case, 'How Deep Is The Ocean?' Something like that truly tests your originality because people know the piece and they can hear how you actually hear by what you do in your approach. There you are."

Of *Neu Beings*, his work, Wallace Roney says, "The inspiration would be that I never got a chance to really play what I really want to play exactly the way I would like. In the past, I have always lost my musicians just when the concept I was looking to perfect almost got right. That has been a big frustration. I have never been able to make complete use of everything that I have been fortunate enough to learn. After playing with Tony Williams, I had assumed that there were a lot of basic things that everybody knew, but I discovered that this is not the fact. I thought all the music actually existed at the same time inside of your interpretation. That's the way it should be

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because you can learn just as much from Louis Armstrong as you can from Miles or Ornette or anybody else. Your personality is how you arrive at a new existence in music. Once that came clear to me, I began to understand what was actually going on. From that experience with Art Blakey, Tony, Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Ornette Coleman, Elvin Jones, McCoy Tyner, and Ron Carter, I got my own ideas of what to do and how I would like to stretch the things I heard and the things I think about in my own musical mind. Experience is the ultimate in this kind of thing. You think about a lot of different elements of music other than what is on recordings when you have the opportunity to listen to the creativity of people who invented a lot of the things other musicians and audiences enjoy. They work on those things from night to night, stretching them and playing with them in ways that are not on recordings.

"This piece is a beginning of making use of two things. Those two things are music I have studied on recordings, and music I have witnessed on bandstands and have thought about through conversations with these musicians. In this composition, we are using inspirations from things such as Charlie Parker, 'Filles de Kilimanjaro,' Coltrane of 'A Love Supreme,' and 'Mwandishi.' And I can now bring together

a fresh perspective that could be an innovative perspective. Anyway, I hope so. If this thing comes off right, it will have elements that each of those seminal bands didn't have in them, which is my way of hearing the music of the past, of the present, and looking for something that could add another direction in the future. One of my conversations with Miles was about how he wanted to have guys of the caliber of Wayne, Herbie, and Tony play what he was doing at the end. He wished he had the opportunity to open up those tunes like 'Human Nature' with the highest level of musicians. I can also say that conversations with Wayne and Elvin were about the same thing; the frustrations that come when you have expectations set in your mind by great musicians and find it very hard to get a chance to do exactly what you want. This evening I have that chance. Here's hoping that people like it and can hear what I'm trying to do and leave with some respect for the piece and musicians."

With such special musicians as Charles McPherson and Wallace Roney, this should be an evening that is not only exciting in itself, but a perfect beginning for a new series bent on bringing together different kinds of playing and thinking within the frame of this marvelous art.

Meet the Artists



Veteran alto saxophonist **Charles McPherson** was born in Joplin, Missouri, and received his musical education in Detroit, Michigan, where he studied with esteemed pianist and educator Barry Harris. At age 19,

he left for New York and soon joined the ensemble of bassist Charles Mingus, with whom he performed intermittently for 12 years. Among his greatest albums with Mingus are *Mingus at Monterey* and *My Favorite Quintet*. Long recognized for his mastery and extensions of the bebop idiom, Mr. McPherson solidified his stature as a premier Charlie Parker disciple by recording Parker's alto parts in Clint Eastwood's 1988 movie *Bird*. In the 1980s, he became known for his planned approach to collective improvisation, typified by his album *The Prophet* (1983). Mr. McPherson also received critical acclaim as one of the powerhouse saxophonists in Bill Cosby's *Cos of Good Music* at the 1995 Playboy Jazz Festival. He has enjoyed an active recording career as a leader and sideman, and released his latest album, *Manhattan Nocturne*, earlier this spring. When he is not performing in New York, or across the rest of the U.S., and Europe, Mr. McPherson resides with his family in San Diego, California.