

## REVIEWS



Stephanie Berger

The saxophonist Joe Henderson, center, with members of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, playing Gershwin at a fund-raiser on Monday night.

## JAZZ REVIEW

# Gershwin Variations Raise Spirits and Cash

By BEN RATLIFF

**At Lincoln Center, familiar tunes are springboards for invention.**

for the jazz institution, was a serious, first-rate concert. It had scores of memorable moments, some excellent new arrangements and a lot of lovely playing by the tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson.

Ed Bradley, a member of the Jazz at Lincoln Center board, was the concise master of ceremonies, and the speeches were only breathers between fortifying stretches of music. Ahmet Ertegun accepted the annual leadership award in honor of his brother, Nesuhi, who died in 1989, his partner in running Atlantic Records. He explained how his fascination with jazz was jump-started when he was 9 and his brother brought him to

see the orchestras of Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway at the London Palladium in the early 1930's. "It started me on the road to learn how to boogie," Mr. Ertegun said.

Oscar Peterson accepted the award for artistic excellence and warmly thanked four without-whoms: Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, the jazz impresario Norman Granz and Count Basie. "I envied Basie," said Mr. Peterson, "because he knew how to leave out the notes I'd always put in."

And as if to demonstrate, he followed that remark with "Embraceable You," in a gorgeous, pensive piano-trumpet duet with Wynton Marsalis, full of long notes and open spaces.

Joe Henderson, with his own touring septet, interpreted five songs from "Porgy and Bess," giving his sighing, woody sound to the music. Chaka Khan, wearing a dazzling violet dress, came out to join the group for "Summertime," shining forth with her blowtorch-force high register as she scatted toward the end of the song.

But the meat of the concert was a series of Gershwin treatments by some of the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra's in-house arrangers. Particularly imaginative were the restructurings of Wycliffe Gordon in "Sweet and Low Down," Andy Farber in "I've Got a Crush on You" and Ted Nash in "Love Is Here to Stay." These were attention-grabbers, full of narrowed-down connective passages and sudden shifts in dynamics, cued by a bopping Mr. Marsalis as conductor.

And the pianist Eric Reed contributed a trio arrangement of "I Got Rhythm" for himself, the bassist Rodney Whitaker and the drummer Herlin Riley that swatted around hot rhythmic ideas, including a mambo, for several euphoric minutes.

At the end of the concert, Tony Bennett, a surprise guest, walked onstage with his quartet. He sang three Gershwin songs associated with Fred Astaire, quietly sharing subtle references with the audience. He proved a point about the melodies and their hold on our imaginations, even when performed at a whisper.

For a jazz band, a concert program of George Gershwin's music is like prime rib to a hound. There isn't a reasonably educated jazz performer around who hasn't internalized "Embraceable You," or at least Charlie Parker's rewriting of it; after Louis Armstrong's and Miles Davis's versions, every trumpet player knows the songs from "Porgy and Bess." And "I Got Rhythm" is a template for thousands of jazz tunes. Gershwin is the friendliest of pretexts for the musicians and the audience.

For its annual awards gala on Monday night, whose audience included Al and Tipper Gore, Bette Midler, Harrison Ford, and quite a few members of the Secret Service, Jazz at Lincoln Center could have celebrated the all-Gershwin program like a holiday, bringing on guests as baubles to surround the trophy-giving. But "Fascinating Rhythms," Monday night's benefit, which raised more than \$1 million