

The Arts

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Jelly Roll and the Duke Join Wolfgang and Ludwig

By JON PARELES

Yesterday, New York became more of a jazz town than ever. In a ceremony followed by a Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra concert of Ellington, Jelly Roll Morton and standards, Jazz at Lincoln Center officially joined the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera, and eight other organizations as a full-fledged constituent of Lincoln Center, the first one added since the Film Society in 1969.

"We're playing, in terms of swinging," said Wynton Marsalis, the artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center. "But we're not

playing around."

Jazz at Lincoln Center has become an independent body, in charge of its own fundraising, marketing and production. "It's like moving out of your parents' house and starting to pay your own rent," said Rob Gibson, the organization's executive director.

Jazz at Lincoln Center's current annual budget is just over \$4 million, comparable in scale to the \$3 million budget of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (the Metropolitan Opera's is \$150 million). As an independent organization, Jazz at Lincoln Center plans to continue expanding its concert programs, educational work, national tours and broadcasts by the Lincoln Center

Jazz is welcomed into Lincoln Center's very exclusive club.

Jazz Orchestra and transcriptions of classic jazz works.

It opened a World Wide Web site on Monday: jazzatlincolncenter.org. And someday, Mr. Gibson and Mr. Marsalis said, Jazz at Lincoln Center would like to have its

own hall, built for jazz performances.

The Lincoln Center announcement capped two weeks of frenetic activity in what is annually New York's busiest jazz season, which now includes two festivals: the venerable JVC Jazz Festival has a downtown rival, the Knitting Factory's eight-year-old Heineken "What Is Jazz?" Festival, which embraces everything from Dutch avant-garde jazz to funk.

As the Knitting Factory's festival title suggests, the boundaries of jazz are still hotly contested. Jazz at Lincoln Center, with its institutional clout, has set out to codify one vision of the form, in which blues flavor

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and swinging rhythms are paramount. Mr. Marsalis has enforced respect for jazz history and utterly proficient execution. Still, the organizers' rhetoric is often more dogmatic than the music they present, which encompasses abstruse harmonies and large-scale structures as well as toe-tapping swing tunes.

At the Knitting Factory, improvisation is the prime virtue, even at the expense of structure, idiomatic purity and, sometimes, professional skills. For JVC, meanwhile, which has catered to the generation that grew up on big bands, sure draws have been disappearing. This year's festival was a jumble of mainstream jazz, tribute concerts, soul, Brazilian pop and cabaret.

Amid a smorgasbord of jazz offerings, this year's festival concerts at larger halls did only middling business, both for Knitting Factory shows at Town Hall and for the annual JVC Jazz Festival, booking Avery Fisher Hall and Carnegie Hall. The JVC Festival drew full houses for major names like the pianists Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock (and for the pop singer Aretha Franklin), but had spotty attendance for tribute concerts and lesser-known performers like the 94-year-old Benny Waters.

Michael Dorf, who owns the Knitting Factory, said that concurrent jazz festivals in Toronto and Montreal had drawn away European and Japanese tourists. He added that he hoped to work with George Wein, producer of the JVC Jazz Festival, to coordinate their marketing next year and bring fans back to New York.

Yet for a listener, New York remains a jazz paradise. Jazz now has institutional support at both Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall (which sponsors its own jazz orchestra), while clubs from Iridium to the Blue Note to the Village Vanguard are



Monica Almeida/The New York Times

Wynton Marsalis and Rob Gibson, leaders of Jazz at Lincoln Center, at an event yesterday making their program a "constituent" of the center.

thriving. Even with empty seats at concerts, jazz in New York is simultaneously a draw for tourists and a testing ground for musicians and ideas.

Competing visions of jazz are good for the music; they bring out passions in both players and listeners. And it would be no great exaggeration for New York to market itself as the capital of jazz controversy, a place where a hundred schools of thought contend and listeners can make up their own minds. Jazz past may eventually resolve itself into the kind of canon that Jazz at Lincoln

Center is striving to create. Yet musicians always test boundaries and restrictions, so jazz present will continue to improvise and break rules.

Jazz has gone through phases of public misperception. Early on, it was seen as disreputable and primitive. By the late 60's it was considered cerebral and noisy and too arduous for the general public. Now, despite its strictures, Jazz at Lincoln Center has established a benchmark for jazz as a rigorous high art that, for all its complexity, has a built-in advantage: "People like it when they hear it," Mr. Marsalis said.



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Jazz is welcomed into the Lincoln Center club. Page C11.