

A NEW DAY FOR AMERICAN MUSIC

BY RETURNING TO ITS ROOTS, JAZZ HAS FOUND ITS FUTURE.

JAZZ HAS ARRIVED AT A CURIous threshold in 1995. Bred in New Orleans from ragtime, blues and European cotillion music, it has had a history of conflict not unlike America's own — between progressives and traditionalists, crowdpleasers and elitists, hot-headed improvisers and hardheaded constructionists. Jazz has been black and white, hot and cool, mournful and jubilant.

But there is reason to believe that jazz is now on the verge of — well, something. To call that something a rebirth would be irresponsible, for a rebirth requires a

death, which jazz has never suffered (although some would argue that "free jazz" and jazz-rock fusion were close enough). To call that something a boom would reduce it to commercialism, which is painful to ponder since jazz was once America's favorite popular music, whereas now it dwells on the margins.

There is, though, a heightened sense of expectation in the jazz climes just now, a spirit of renewal. The Jazz at Lincoln Center program, begun four years ago, has created intense interest (and, typically, controversy). And consider this year's JVC Jazz Festival, now in the midst of its New York run. Besides kingpins like Oscar Peterson and Illinois Jacquet, it features a raft of stellar young players, including Cyrus Chestnut, Danilo Perez, James Carter and Joshua Redman (above), all of whom have surfaced as band leaders only within the past few years. Much of this momentum can be traced to Wynton Marsalis, the trumpeter, composer and artistic director of the Lincoln Center program. There is a sweet



symmetry to the fact that jazz is being led into its second century by a 33-year-old son of New Orleans, the town where Buddy Bolden and Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong helped define how its first century would sound.

The second century will sound considerably different. For all his Dixieland provenance, Marsalis seems less interested in revival than in revolution. He has extended himself in many directions, from the hard bop on which he made his name to the classical and ballet pieces he has written to the gospel and work songs he has incorporated into jazz suites.

As would be expected in this fractious century, Marsalis has been denounced in some jazz quarters as an anti-modernist. But his influence has been felt mightily — by the players maturing in his shadow and by everyone who listens to the music. For there is something exhilarating about the brash synthesis that Marsalis is creating, and its sprawling effect. And there is something liberating about a jazz figure who isn't afraid to start a new argument in order to resolve the old ones.

Over and over, like some desperate, nostalgic mantra, we have called jazz "America's classical music," as if such flattery would coax it back into the mainstream. The come-on didn't work, and just as well: The landscape is suddenly crammed with players who have absorbed the past, made it their own and gotten so busy reinventing the music that there is no time for nostalgia. As Frank Conroy, an author with a deep memory and feel for jazz, writes in the following pages, it's a new day for American music.

—STEPHEN J. DUBNER

With a three-hour oratorio called 'Blood on the Fields,' Wynton Marsalis ascends to the jazz pantheon and extends the canon. He also proves that jazz is a living, breathing art form, not a lovable antique. By Frank Conroy

THE STUDIO, PART I

N THE OLD MASONIC HALL BEING USED AS A RECORDING STUDIO, WYNTON Marsalis tells the band to take a 10-minute break, steps down from the podium, comes over and gives me a hug. We sit down in the old theater seats.

"Man," he says, "I am tired of all this stuff they're writing about me. It has

nothing to do with music."

"The dogs bark, but the caravan rolls on," I quote.

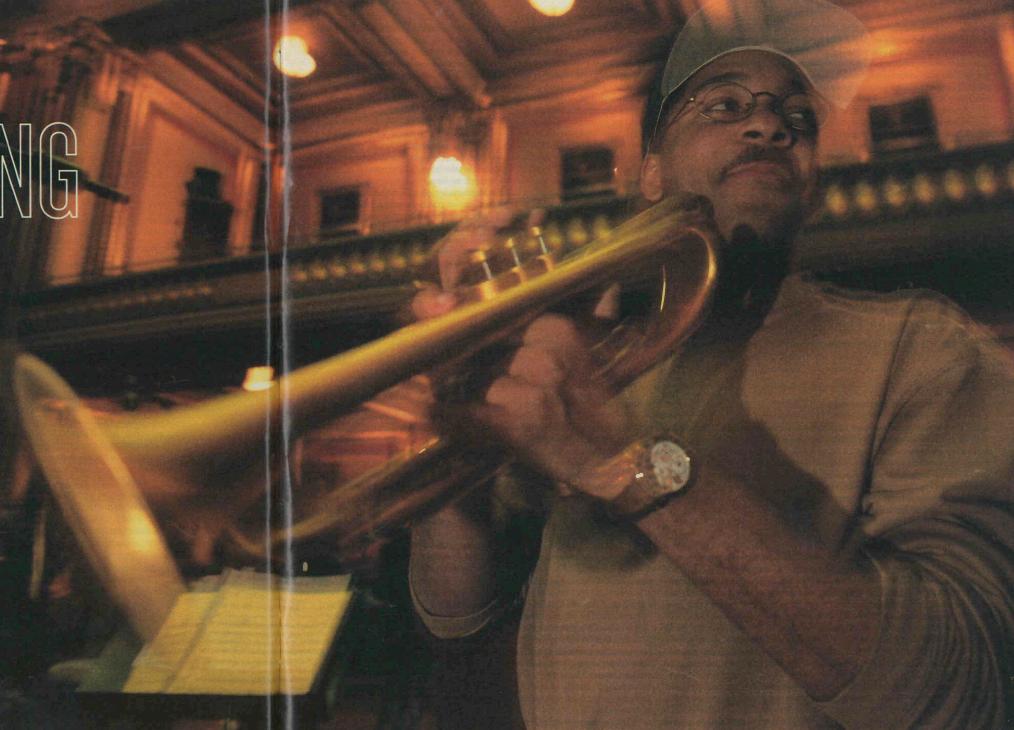
He laughs. "Hey, that's good. I'll have to remember that."

I had read various sniping reports in the media. That he was an archivist, insufficiently avant-garde. That he didn't hire enough white players or play enough music written by whites. That he was provincial. That he was insufficiently sensitive to multiculturalism (translation: not part of the current fad of "world music," whatever that is). Low-level cavils from the right and from the left, which had saddened me, since he is a musical genius, the leader of a powerful renaissance in jazz and a tireless educator of the young. Personally, he is charismatic, a lover of argument, a firm, not to say tenacious, defender of his opinions about music, politics, philosophy and everything else, very bright and mildly impatient — all of which rubs some people the wrong way.

As both an artist and an observer of the musical scene, Marsalis is drawn to clarity. He abhors confusion. Unfortunately, a good deal of confusion continues to exist in the jazz world, partly because the old order is giving way to the new and partly because of the history of obscurantism, defensiveness and hermeticism that has prevailed for

something like 50 years.

Jazz is a fine art, and the only fine art to have been developed from scratch in America, where recognition, paradoxically, has been slow in coming - perhaps because the music emerged from black culture, from the bottom (economically



AZZ IS A WONDERFULLY OPEN AND ELASTIC MUSIC THAT HAS, IN its relatively short history, absorbed energy from myriad sources. Europe, Africa, Cuba and Latin America are where the harmonies, scales, rhythms and instruments came from. Jazz forms have emerged from gospel, marching band music, Tin Pan Alley, rags, blues, show tunes, classical music, field hollers and so on — listed here in no particular order.

A restless music, the best practitioners of which have adhered to Ezra Pound's credo "make it new" with particular intensity, sometimes to ill effect. As one might expect in such a volatile environment, there have been plenty of fads, pan-flashes, phony theories and dead ends.

The tension between the urge to make it new and the awareness of possible dead ends creates an atmosphere in which contention thrives. For matter.) As a teen-ager, I went to one of those extravagant Carnegie Hall jazz shows - one group after another for hours - specifically to hear Charlie Parker. (Claude Hopkins, an important dance-band leader in Harlem, had told me about Bird while giving me a free piano lesson in the basement of an old Dixie club called Stuyvesant Casino.) Backed up by a small string section, Parker played like a demented angel - but he was billed seventh or eighth; few in the audience knew of him and fewer still listened with more than half an ear.

Perhaps 10 years later, I was part of an on-going jam session in the

Street in the Village. One night, the owner approached me as I was getting up from the piano. "You should listen to the guy upstairs," he said. "You could learn a lot." (Downstairs was a walk-in bar; upstairs was tablecloths, waiters and a cover charge - this last waived for musicians, as was the

came to hear them and the heartbroken owner had to let them go.

downstairs bar of a club on Eighth custom in those days.)

I did indeed go upstairs, and what I heard there drastically, almost violently, opened up my understanding of what might be possible in jazz. It was possible to voice chords without playing the roots. It was possible to play an entire tune without a dominant seventh and the kinds of cycles that flow from dominant sevenths. A great deal could be accomplished by implication; one didn't have to state everything, or play all the notes of a given scale or chord. That which was left out was sometimes as important as that which was included. I listened to the trio for three nights and for most of the time I was an audience of one. Too overwhelmed to talk to the musicians myself (they seemed a bit standoffish in any case), I nevertheless tried to get some of the funky-blues musicians from downstairs to come up and check it out. They'd listen to a tune, or part of a tune, and then leave. "Cocktail music," they said. I had thought so too, but only for the first five minutes. The trio was Bill Evans, Scott LaFaro and Paul Motian, in what I believe to be Evans's first New York gig. No one

The way it was. Charlie Parker with the Metronome All Stars in 1949.

more than 40 years, I've watched and listened as jazz people yelled, screamed, shook their fists and generally lost their cool over one issue after another. Obsessions with the idea of "progress" have obscured awareness of how jazz has moved through time, of what jazz carries from the past into the emergency of the present and, indeed, what the music in fact is or should be.

Whatever he eventually came to believe, Louis Armstrong was initially deeply suspicious of be-bop, which surfaced in Harlem in the late 1930's - an extremely important style

whose harmonic complexity and contrapuntal sophistication created a new paradigm. Classical jazz, or Dixie, and modern jazz, or be-bop, were to run in parallel paths, almost never touching, for more than 50 years. Only recently has jazz moved past this schism, because the young players see it all as related music, different colors on the same palette, all to be used.

Maybe the fighting started there, with the classical jazz-modern jazz split, but it grew to the point that it sometimes felt like there was no other way to talk. To look back is to remember people arguing about issues great and small (long after the canonization of be-bop) and to remember how fans absolutely had to have a position on everything. East Coast "hot" (say, Clifford Brown) as against West Coast "cool" (say, Chet Baker). The Apollonian approach of the Modern Jazz Quartet as opposed to the Dionysian approach of the Art Blakey quintets. The so-called third stream. The Lydian Method. "Free" playing. Fusion. Acoustic versus electric. And so forth and so on. My point is not to make a complete list, but to show the pattern, the long history of arguing and nitpicking.

In part because of all this posturing, jazz fans have often not known what was happening even as it happened around them. (Some players, too, for that

In some senses, having fans can be worse than not having them, worse at least for the musician who is trying to reconcile the music being played with the feedback from those listening to it. The Beat Generation took up jazz with enthusiasm. Kerouac, Corso, Ginsberg et al. prowled the jazz clubs listening to bop musicians and praising the emotional spontaneity of their solos, the freedom from constraints of form. They believed the "wild" sounds were direct, unfettered expressions of raw emotion - some kind of animistic, ejaculatory jungle music. They were unaware of bop's grounding in Bach and its continuation of the reconciliation of chromaticism and tonality, let alone its neo-baroque, rule-ridden severity. So intent were the Beats in co-opting jazz into their abject romanticism they did not hear the music. Like so many others, they patronized, projected and did not hear.

IF YOU GO TO THE JAZZ SECTION OF YOUR LOCAL RECORD STORE AND pick randomly, you will get mostly music based on two short forms - the blues (usually, but not always, a 12-bar structure) and Continued on page 48 speaking) up. Some protectiveness and secrecy on the part of the musicians was perhaps to be expected. Many black musicians were covetous, and some grew angry through the years as they saw white players making more money than themselves playing jazz or watered-down jazz. (It used to be said that jazz players were either black, Jewish, Italian or Irish - very close to the truth - and it was the blacks getting the short end of the stick from the union, the recording studios and the bookers.)

As well, jazz had an ominous side. Most players were honest, hardworking men, often subsidizing their music with ordinary jobs, known as "day gigs," but there were also drug addicts and dealers, thieves and pimps. A number of very famous players in the 1940's and 1950's ran strings of prostitutes to augment their incomes. Thus, there were people creating sublimely beautiful music while living sublimely ugly lives (strengthening the vulgar and false idea that the authenticity of the music was a function of the degree of misery in the life of the player). Public perception of jazz has been heavily tainted with notions of criminality and degeneracy, and lingers still, albeit faintly, despite the fact that conditions have changed completely.

There are jazz programs in virtually all the colleges and universities. Jazz clubs around the country are "high class" and expensive. Institutional efforts like Jazz at Lincoln Center (of which Marsalis is the artistic director, thus

For the moment, a distinction should be drawn between outdated notions of progress and modern attempts to trace and extend the organic evolution of jazz. (The basic concept from biology, that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny — or more simply stated, that individual growth mirrors the history of the species — is useful in music.) The way to strengthen one's ability to tell the difference between progress and evolution is to study the canon — that music which has had the longest and deepest influence because the canon contains the evolutionary signposts and implies how jazz can spiral outward without losing its identity.

For instance, the canon suggests an expansion into long forms, forms of a length we usually associate with so-called classical music. One of the most important missions of Jazz at Lincoln Center is to lay down a foundation for the future of jazz by presenting important works from the canon with all the

passion and intelligence that can be brought to bear.

I remember sitting all night at a Manhattan club called the Half Note listening to John Coltrane play with his famous rhythm section. I was there for the first public performance of "My Favorite Things," a superficially sappy song done by Julie Andrews in "The Sound of Music." Coltrane stated the theme, instantly making it his own through his phrasing, and proceeded to improvise in a carefully structured series of related scales and

WILL LEAD TO A TIME WHEN JAZZ IS NO LONGER MARGINALIZED, WHEN ARTISTS WORK CREATE WORK AS STRONG AS, AND PERHAPS STRONGER THAN. THOSE WORKING FROM EUROPEAN TRADITIONS.

drawing heat from people who would like a different kind of programming) are springing up around the country. The new generation of players are, by and large, educated, cultured people in their 20's more likely to be vegetarians than drug addicts, more likely to run three miles a day than smoke cigarettes and more likely to be carrying an organ-donor card than a gun. There is a French expression, nostalgie de la boue, which means nostalgia for the gutter, and it is perhaps that preoccupation slowing down so many jazz fans, observers and writers from recognizing reality.

Jazz is American. It belongs to everybody now, black, white, Latin, to all those who have added to it and all those who have been moved by it. Fresh breezes are invigorating the music, which in turn promises to once again invigorate American culture itself. (And at this point, American culture needs all the good stuff it can get.) Heretofore, composers working from a European tradition have dipped in for a bit of spice and energy — Ives, Copland, Gershwin and others who used jazzy effects — but I believe the current renaissance will lead to a time when jazz is no longer marginalized, when artists working in jazz traditions will create work as strong as, and perhaps stronger than, those working from European traditions.

For a long time, jazz fans and players have been obsessed with the idea of "progress." Because of the speed and abruptness of the be-bop revolution, people were looking for something quick, and what they got, mostly, were garden paths leading to no place in particular. Progress is a dubious concept in any art - have we had progress in poetry, in the novel, in painting or in dance?

I don't think so.

The idea is inappropriately linear, less useful than the model of a kind of pulsating spiral, moving out, moving in, but over time growing larger, covering more territory. Jazz is at a point when the spiral is moving out, and all the old arguments, sports-fan mentalities, show-biz preoccupations and theoretical dogmas seem as dated as the novels of Mickey Spillane. It will take a new generation of writers to write about a new generation of players and composers, and let us hope that deconstructionists, politically correct busybodies and agenda-driven theorists will not be in their number.

modes more and more remote from the original.

He played for almost an hour, his slender soprano saxophone heartbreakingly tender one moment, thick and angry the next, singing out cries, as it were, from many hearts. There was so much emotion, so much density of emotion, I was effectively hypnotized through the entire performance.

Later, as I thought about his ascent through the different scales and modes (over a kind of tonal drone from the other instruments), I thought I realized why he had picked that unlikely tune. It was harmonically perfect for a grand tour of related scales, with which he created what the great French teacher of composition, Nadia Boulanger, used to call "la grande ligne," a clear swooping line that arises in a piece from the beginning to the end. The inner music. Evolution.

I had never heard anything like it in jazz. To see and hear it right there in front of me, brand new, was more thrilling than I can describe. What I feel now, as I sense all of jazz on the brink of a new era, is the anticipation of the same kind of excitement.

FTER THE 10-MINUTE BREAK, THE RECORDING SESSION RECOMmences. The piece, "Blood on the Fields," is the largest and most daring of Marsalis's compositions to date, and the first to include voices.

I sit beside Eric Reed, a superb young pianist from Los Angeles who plays the very difficult score. Chords are not fully notated but suggested by the traditional jazz symbols, which means that Eric is free to voice them any way he wants. In order to get the best sound, he has to listen with extraordinary care to what all the other instruments are doing and decide his voicings on the spot. Sometimes the chords come four to the bar. His playing is simply dazzling.

During one sequence, he prepares the piano by placing his jacket over the treble strings, improvises a series of dancing staccato riffs, removes the jacket and plays the last chords of the section. In the small silence that follows, he turns his head to me. "'How High the Moon,'" he says, "it ain't." He speaks the truth. It's a new day for American music.

A JAZZOGRAPH

FROM STORYVILLE TO LINCOLN CENTER...



c. 1840 Adolphe Sax, a Belgian, invents the saxophone.

1902 The 12-year-old Jelly Roll Morton "invents" jazz, or so he later claims. A habitué of Storyville, the red-light district of New Orleans, Morton combines ragtime, French quadrilles and the hot blues played by Buddy Bolden, the notoriously hard-living cornetist.

1917 The Dixieland Jazz Band, a white group, makes the first jazz recording, "Livery Stable Blues." It sells a million copies, launching jazz as popular music. Freddie Keppard, a black band leader, had rejected the chance to make the first jazz record — he was afraid other musicians would copy his style.

1925-1928 Take it away, Satchmo: With his Hot Fives and Hot Sevens recordings, Louis Armstrong revolutionizes the jazz form, encouraging solo improvisation over ensemble playing.

1929-1945 The swing era rises and falls. Duke

Ellington, Jimmie
Lunceford and Count
Basie lead influential
groups. Most of the
big hits, though, are
recorded by white band
leaders like Glenn
Miller, Benny Goodman
and Tommy Dorsey.

c. 1935-1955: The jam session as art form: West 52d Street in Manhattan, packed with clubs, becomes the playground for Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk and all their friends.

1936 Well before the rest of the country, jazz becomes integrated. At the Congress Hotel in Chicago, Lionel Hampton and Teddy Wilson sit in with Benny Goodman's ensemble. Two years later, Billie Holiday joins Artie Shaw's big band.

1939 While playing "Cherokee" during a Harlem jam session, Charlie Parker happens upon a harmonic discovery that leads to be-bop, a far more intricate style of jazz, both harmonically and rhythmically.

1943 Jazz ascends to the concert hall: The first of Duke Ellington's annual Carnegie Hall programs and the premiere of "Black, Brown and Beige," his influential long-form work about the history of American blacks.

1951 On the heels of Miles Davis's "Birth of the Cool," musicians like Chet Baker and Gerry Mulligan form the so-called cool school, turning down the volume and intensity. It happens, of course, in California.

1951 Sidney Bechet relocates to Paris, the first of many American jazz expatriates including Kenny Clarke, Arthur Taylor and Bud Powell. Racial tension was less pronounced, and European audiences were more appreciative.

1954 Jazz goes outdoors: George Wein, a pianist and singer, rewrites his jazz résumé by inviting musicians to Newport, R.I., for the first of many Jazz Festivals.

dream: Ella Fitzgerald makes the first of several "Songbook" recordings for Verve, the impresario Norman Granz's new label. The Songbooks make Fitzgerald an international star.

1959 A pivotal year, with several records that expand the very possibilities of improvisation: Miles Davis's "Kind of Blue," John Coltrane's "Giant Steps," Ornette Coleman's "Shape of Jazz to Come."

1964 The avant-garde gains mainstream recognition as Thelonious Monk makes the cover of Time magazine, which



christens him the high priest of be-bop.

1969 Miles Davis's "Bitches Brew," a primordial jazz-rock fusion record, sells 500,000 copies, turning many rock fans on to jazz but leaving some hard-core Miles followers groaning.

1972-1977 New York's "loft jazz" scene blooms, with experimental, post-bop players performing

in lofts like Ali's Alley. Among the players on the scene are Joe Lovano and David Murray.

1979 On Jan. 5, the famously cosmic Charles Mingus dies in Cuernavaca, Mexico, at the age of 56. That same day, 56 whales beach themselves on the Mexican coast.

1984 The new generation gets a leader who looks backward: Wynton Research: Travis A. Jackson

Marsalis, at 22, wins a Grammy for his "neobop" record "Think of One." The same night, he takes a classical Grammy for his recording of trumpet concertos.

1989-1991 Frontmen and backlash: Trying to duplicate Marsalis's commercial success, record labels snap up straight-ahead players like Roy Hargrove, Antonio Hart and Christopher Hollyday. Much grumbling ensues from those who consider these so-called Young Lions too imitative or too green.

1991 Jazz as institution: Marsalis is appointed



artistic director of the new Jazz at Lincoln Center program. Big audiences but big detractors, too, who claim that Marsalis is antimodernist and anti-white.

1992 A new fusion trip: The British "acid jazz" group Us3, which blends hip-hop and electronic samples of jazz cuts, gets permission to raid the Blue Note archives. Meanwhile, in Brooklyn, the hip-hop group Digable Planets records "Rebirth of Slick (Cool Like Dat)," using the horn lines of James Williams's "Stretchin'." Suddenly, a new degree of jazz cool.

Duke Ellington at the Paramount Theater, 1947.



Five Standards You Might Have Heard at the Village Vanguard 40 Years Ago

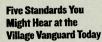
"Body and Soul," written by Johnny Green, Edward Heyman, Robert Sour, Frank Eyton

"I'll Remember April," Don Raye, G. DePaul, P. Johnson

"The Man I Love," George and Ira Gershwin

"Star Dust," Mitchell Parish, Hoagy Carmichael "These Foolish Things,"

Jack Strachey, Harry Link, Holt Marvell



"Giant Steps," Iohn Coltrane Chelsea Bridge," Billy Strayborn In Your Own Sweet Way." Dave Brubeck Oleo," Sonny Rollins "Bolivia," Cedar Walton



the Harvard summa cum laude saxophonist, chooses jazz over Yale Law and releases two records within a year. Critics love the records and fans love Redman: in concert, young women shriek and young men pump their fists in the air.

June 1995 The Impulse record label, one of the most important in jazz history, is revived after a 21-year dormancy. It is the seventh major jazz label to be launched or relaunched in the past 10 years.

Ready to Break Out?

The best underappreciated younger musicians, cited in a straw poll of their more established peers

Kenny Garrett, alto saxophone; Sam Newsome, tenor and soprano saxophones; Steve Nelson, vibraphone; Steve Wilson, alto and soprano saxophones; Bruce Barth, piano; Donald Brown, piano; Leon Parker, drums

If You Were Going Into the Studio Today . .

The most in-demand sidemen, cited in a straw poll of their peers (and, in parentheses, whom they've played with)

Roy Hargrove, trumpet and fluegelhorn (Betty Carter, Joshua Redman); Antonio Hart, alto and soprano saxophones (Nat Adderley, Slide Hampton); Mulgrew Miller, piano (Cassandra Wilson, Kenny Garrett); Christian McBride, bass (Joe Henderson,

Joshua Redman); Lewis Nash, drums (Mulerew Miller, Joe Lovano)

Over the Rainbow, Not the Hill

Six players over 60 who, their colleagues say, don't get the respect they deserve.

Benny Golson, tenor saxophone; Jimmy Heath, tenor saxophone; Slide Hampton, trombone; J. J. Johnson, trombone; Hank Jones, piano; James Moody, alto and tenor saxophones

Must-Have Jazz

A highly subjective, utterly noncomprehensive list of 10 records that most jazz musicians would agree are mandatory listening:

Jelly Roll Morton, "The Pearls," 1926-1928 (Bluebird) Louis Armstrong, "Hot Fives and Sevens," Volume 3, 1927-1928 (Columbia) Duke Ellington, "The Blanton-Webster Band," 1940-1942 (Bluebird) Charlie Parker, "Savoy Sessions,"

Volumes 1 and 2, 1944-1947 (Savoy) Billie Holiday, "The Quintessential Billie Holiday," Volume 9, 1940-1942 (Columbia) Thelonious Monk, "Genius of Modern Music," Volumes 1 and 2, 1947-1952 (Blue Note)

Miles Davis, "Kind of Blue," 1959 (Columbia)

Ornette Coleman, "The Shape of Jazz to Come," 1959 (Atlantic) John Coltrane, "Crescent," 1964 (Impulse) Wayne Shorter, "Speak No Evil," 1966 (Blue Note)

The 10 Best-Selling Jazz Records of 1994, **According to Billboard**

- Tony Bennett: "Steppin' Out"
 Tony Bennett: "MTV Unplugged"
- 3. Harry Connick Jr.: "25"
- 4. Cassandra Wilson: "Blue Light "Til Dawn"
- 5. Grover Washington Jr.: "All My
- Various Artists: "Swing Kids" soundtrack
- 7. Diane Schuur/B. B. King: "Heart to Heart"
- 8. Joshua Redman: "Wish"
- 9. Ella Fitzgerald: "The Best of the Songbooks"
- 10. Lena Horne: "We'll Be Together

The 10 Best Jazz Records of 1994, **According to Peter Watrous of** The Times

Wessell Anderson: "Warmdaddy in the Garden of Swing" James Carter: "J. C. on the Set" Cyrus Chestnut: "Revelation" Marty Ehrlich: "Can You Hear a Motion"

Darrell Grant: "Black Art" Julius Hemphill: "Five Chord Stud"



Rodney Kendrick: "Dance World Dance" Wynton Marsalis: "In This House, on This Morning"

Mario Pavone: "Song for (Septet)" Danilo Perez: "The Journey"

Hank Jones's Five Favorite Piano Players

Art Tatum, Oscar Peterson, George Shearing, James Williams, Mulgrew Miller

Wynton Marsalis's Five Favorite Trumpet Players

Gabriel (the archangel), Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Rafael Mendez, Dizzy Gillespie

Milt Hinton's Five Favorite Bassists

Ray Brown, Ron Carter, Rufus Reid, Lynn Seaton, Christian McBride

Elvin Jones's Five Favorite Drummers

Jo Jones, Max Roach, Art Blakey, Kenny Clarke, Shadow Wilson



Best - and Strangest -Sign that a Jazz Renaissance Is Indeed **Under Way**

Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pa., is hosting a "jazz fantasy vacation" next month where nonprofessional, jazz-playing adults get to jam with Ellis Marsalis.