



Wynton Marsalis Awarded Legion of Honor

JAZZ MUSICIAN TO RECEIVE FRANCE'S HIGHEST DISTINCTION IN NEW YORK

New York, September 22, 2009—On November 6, **French Ambassador Pierre Vimont** will confer upon **Wynton Marsalis** the insignia of chevalier of the **Legion of Honor**. The ceremony, which will take place at the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in New York, will be co-hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Philippe Camus (partner of Lagardère, Evercore, and chairman of Alcatel-Lucent). A performance by the Wynton Marsalis Quintet will follow the ceremony.

Wynton Marsalis, one of the most acclaimed jazz musicians of his generation, is also a celebrated composer of both jazz and classical music, an inspiring educator and a tireless advocate for many charitable and humanitarian causes. He has paved the way for jazz to be fully recognized as a sophisticated art in its own right. Marsalis co-founded **Jazz at Lincoln Center** in 1987, the first cultural institution solely devoted to jazz. Under his leadership, Jazz at Lincoln Center produces up to 2,000 events annually in 15 countries. Mr. Marsalis himself performs annually in France and has been a headliner at the world famous **Jazz in Marciac** festival since 1991. This French city has adopted him as its own and erected a statue in his honor in 1997.

Born in 1961, Wynton Marsalis started playing the trumpet at the age of 6 and by the time he was 14, he was performing Haydn's Concerto for trumpet with the New Orleans Philharmonic. Talented and hard working, he is one of the few trumpeters who excel in both jazz and classical music. In 1983 he earned the distinction of being the only artist ever to win Grammy Awards for both jazz and classical records (an accomplishment he repeated the following year). In all, Marsalis has won nine Grammy Awards and is the only artist to have won in five consecutive years (1983-1987). He is also the first jazz musician and composer to have received the Pulitzer Prize for Music (*Blood on the Fields*, 1997).

In addition to playing, Wynton Marsalis is a prolific composer. Commissions have included pieces for Garth Fagan Dance, the New York City Ballet, the American Ballet Theatre, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society and the New York Philharmonic. His latest composing projects include new symphonies for the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (November 2009 premiere) and Berlin Philharmonic (June 2010 premiere). Eager to share his knowledge and support new generations of musicians, Marsalis is a tireless teacher and lecturer. Honorary degrees from more than 30 universities, including Harvard, Yale and Howard have been bestowed upon him in recognition of his efforts in education.

According to Wynton Marsalis, what one hears in a great jazz band is the sound of democracy: "The jazz band works best when participation is shaped by intelligent communication." Through his music and life, Marsalis represents this universal ideal throughout the world, a philosophy that was reinforced in 2001, when he was named a U.N. Goodwill Ambassador and Messenger of Peace by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. In an effort to revitalize his native New Orleans, Marsalis has organized major fund-raising efforts to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina and preserve the city's cultural base and jazz community. Thanks to his ties to France, he played a key role in helping Louisiana jazz musicians obtain residencies across the Atlantic to continue their craft after the disaster.

The highest award bestowed by the French government, the **National Order of the Legion of Honor** was founded by **Napoleon Bonaparte** to recognize outstanding achievement in the military as well as in the public and private sectors. The Order is made up of five ranks: *chevalier*, *officier*, *commandeur*, *grand officier*, and *grand croix*. Recipients are named by decree signed by the President of the Republic. The Legion of Honor may be awarded to foreign citizens, though such recognition is relatively rare. American honorees include John Ashbery, Renée Fleming, Barbara Streisand, and Elie Wiesel, as well as hundreds of World War II veterans.

The ceremony is being organized in collaboration with La Maison Française-Washington, D.C. With special thanks to Champagne Paul Goerg and Steinway & Sons.

For more information:

Director of Awards and Events

Paula Cianci

Press Attaché

Amaury Laporte

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