

# MSU Jazz ranks 3rd in nation in prestigious Jazz at Lincoln Center competition

## Four student musicians recognized for outstanding performances.



Michigan State University's Jazz Orchestra I and Jazz Octet I ensembles went to New York City and came home swinging as a top finisher in the Jazz at Lincoln Center inaugural Jack Rudin Jazz Championship, January 18-19.



Flanked by Jazz at Lincoln Center Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis and VP of Education Todd Stoll, Professor Whitaker accepts the award for third in the nation at the inaugural Jack Rudin Jazz Championship.

The two-day invitational featured ensembles from 10 of the most well-regarded university jazz programs in the country, and MSU finished third in the



MSU Jazz Octet I warming up for their performance in the Appel Room at Jazz at Lincoln Center, January 18, 2020. Diego Rivera, director.



Student Jazz musicians at MSU have grown together as a family under the direction of Professor Whitaker and the other Professors of Jazz. The way they lift each other up was on full display all weekend in New York.

rankings, resulting in a \$5,000 award for the MSU Jazz Studies program in the College of Music.

Director of Jazz Studies [Rodney Whitaker](#) led the bands comprised of 23 accomplished, aspiring jazz musicians from the college's nationally-recognized program. In the competition which was held throughout Frederick P. Ross Hall, home of Jazz at the Lincoln Center on Broadway, Spartans competed against jazz groups from respected programs from The Juilliard School, Eastman School of Music, Manhattan School of Music, Temple University, California State University, University of Northern Colorado, University of North Texas, Indiana University and North Carolina Central University.

“I view Jazz at Lincoln Center as the premiere place for jazz in America, so to be invited as one of the top ten is an honor in and of itself,” said Whitaker, University Distinguished Professor of jazz bass. “To take third among this esteemed group makes the honor even sweeter, and it reflects the hard work that our students have put in to make this happen.”



"I am so happy to have had the opportunity to show the dedication we have towards the music and each other. I'm honored to be awarded as a soloist, with special gratitude to Prof. & Mrs. Whittaker, and donors that made the trip possible." Jack Brandfield

The Jack Rudin Jazz Championship honors the legacy of the longtime supporter of Jazz at Lincoln Center, and his support for Essentially Ellington, the organization's signature education program, competition and festival. The new invitation-only championship provides participating ensembles with quality literature and a forum to celebrate excellence, achievement and higher education.

Four MSU student musicians were recognized as outstanding soloists during the competition. Liany Mateo, bass, Sequoia Snyder, piano, Samuel Corey, tenor saxophone, and Jackson Brandfield, baritone saxophone, were all singled out by the competition judges and announced by renowned trumpeter and Jazz at Lincoln Center Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis.

“I was really surprised to hear my name as there were so many great bass players,” Mateo said, “but I ultimately feel really honored that I was recognized, especially by some legends (the judges) - all thanks to Professor Whitaker.”

But Mateo, a senior from New Jersey, said the highlight for her was the friendship on display among her fellow Spartans. “I truly couldn't be more proud of the band,” she said. “Every rehearsal is like playing music with your best friends. As far as I am concerned, we are champions in every regard. We set an example for other programs with our camaraderie and how we lift everyone up with us, in true MSU style.”

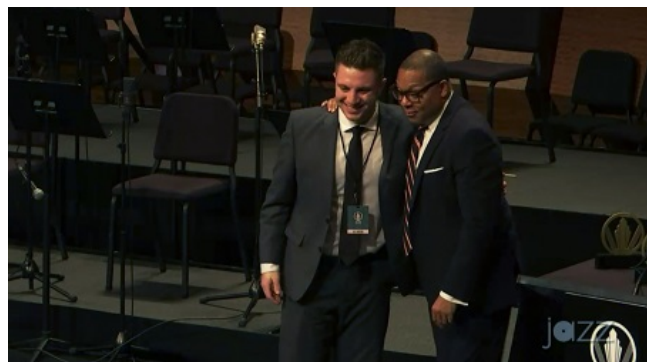


Bassist Liany Mateo was recognized as Outstanding Bass Soloist at the competition, an honor especially considering she was the only bassist chosen and the judge was none other than the legendary Ron Carter. Luke Sittard, guitar, and Michael Reed, drums.

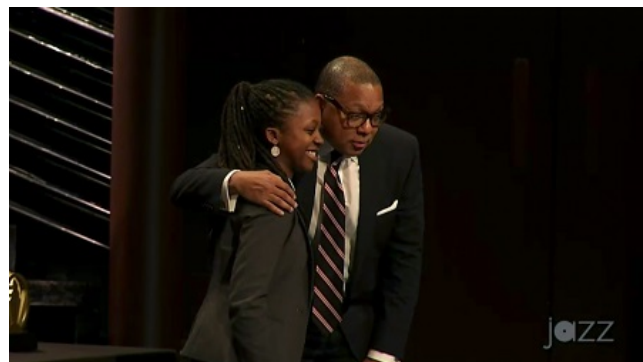




MSU Jazz Octet I performing in the Appel Room as part of the combo showcase at Jazz at Lincoln Center, January 18, 2020. The enthusiastic Spartans in the crowd cheered for the MSU students all weekend.



"Our experience in New York was incredible. It was great to meet so many musicians our age that are as passionate about this music as we are. Being presented an outstanding soloist award by Wynton Marsalis was a huge honor." Sam Corey



"I have been overwhelmed with gratitude for the gift of music, all the joy and opportunity it has given me and for the people who choose to invest in it and young artists like myself." - Sequoia Snyder

"The Professors of Jazz at MSU, led by Professor Whitaker, have clearly developed one of the best jazz programs in the United States," said College of Music Dean James Forger. "The individual and collective performances at the Appel Room and Rose Theatre recently were remarkable, and they reflect the excellent instruction, hard work and deep sense of responsibility and community that characterizes MSU Jazz."

Competition events included a combo showcase and a final concert featuring the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Ensembles also participated in rehearsals and workshops. The final competition featured the top four bands. Taking first was Temple University followed by Indiana University.

"The whole band was really excited when we found out we were a finalist," said senior drummer Will Crandell. "We were all extremely proud of our performance and how we represented ourselves on stage, and I was so



MSU Jazz Orchestra I having a lighthearted moment in the Appel Room at Jazz at Lincoln Center before their evening performance. The camaraderie among the group made their playing infectious and added to the fun of an amazing weekend.



Dean James Forger, right, and an enthusiastic group of Spartans were joined by Wynton Marsalis (center, left) at a post-concert reception.

happy to hear that Liany got the soloist award. She is one the most hardworking and dedicated people I've ever met, and she played an amazing solo."

Sponsors who made this unforgettable trip to New York possible for MSU students are the Gretchen C. Valade Endowment for the Arts, [Michigan State University Federal Credit Union](#), April Clobes and Glen Brough, and Rob Last and Jill Canny.

"We could not have done this without the generous support of our sponsors and the entire MSU Music community," Whitaker said. "Jazz at MSU is a family, and with this recognition our students today have made the entire family proud."

*For more information on the competition, visit [Jazz at Lincoln Center](#) and read their [press release](#) with further details.*

*If you are interested in supporting Jazz at MSU, contact Senior Director of Development Rebecca Surian at (517) 353-9939 or [surian@msu.edu](mailto:surian@msu.edu).*

---

**TOPICS FILED UNDER:**

success stories