

Jazz, Amazing Jazz

by Phyllis Chesler



Sunday afternoon, sheltering at home, I clicked on the jazz concert “Legacies of Excellence” at Lincoln Center. Catherine Russell was the host and vocalist and she was joined by Sean Mason, (on the ivories), Camille Thurman, (on saxophone and vocals) Bruce Harris (on trumpet), Russell Hall (on bass), Bob Garcia (on drums), Mariel Bildstein (on the trombone) and they performed a “classical” ensemble music concert, which reprised the works of Louis Armstrong, Mary Lou Williams, Theolonius Monk, Charley “Bird” Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, Ella Fitzgerald, Art Blakey, and Duke Ellington. It was swing, smooth, and be-bop great, and Monk and Dizzy indescribable, and took me back to my teenage love affair with jazz—I haunted Birdland, The Blue Note, Sweet Basil, and I kept on listening through my college years.

I say this was a “classical” concert because they honored their own past, swing, be-bop, post-swing and post-be-bop, did not erase it, or seek to judge it by any current standards. Even if they tried, it would not have worked because these composers and musicians are both of their time—and timeless. Thurman scatting a la Ella; Russell sang Ellington’s “It Don’t Mean as Thing if it ain’t got that Swing.” I loved Gillespie’s “A Night in Tunisia” and Williams’ “What’s Your Story Morning Glory.” They reminded us of each composer’s and musician’s importance and history. And there they were: three women, two white people, and five smooth black performers all making beautiful music together. My only criticism: It did not last long enough!