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## Party lines: *people, places and politics*



Photographs by James R. Brantley/The Washington Times

Jazz greats Al Jarreau (from left), Lonnie Plaxico, Flora Purim and Terence Blanchard wowed the Kennedy Center Eisenhower Theater crowd with a jam during the 17th annual Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocals Competition Monday night.

## Passing the vocal-jazz torch

**P**resent and future generations of jazz greats met, mingled and grooved during Monday evening's finals of the 17th annual Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocals Competition at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater.

The highlights were many.

An all-star jam session featured keyboard masters **Herbie Hancock** and **George Duke**; vocalists **Dee Dee Bridgewater**, **Al Jarreau**, **Flora Purim** and **Kurt Elling**; trumpeters **Terence Blanchard** and **Clark Terry**; saxophonists **Wayne Shorter** and **Jimmy Heath**; bassist **Lonnie Plaxico**; and **Carl Allen** and **T.S. Monk** — the son of the Monk Institute's namesake — on drums.

Although the institute initially planned on just three winners, vocal sparring among the 13 contestants the previous day at the Smithsonian's Baird Auditorium had proved so stiff that four finalists were chosen. (Overall, 170 vocalists worldwide submitted tapes.)

"The level of competition was overwhelming," Mr. Monk said. The victors: fourth place.



Vocalist **Robin McKelle**, the third-place winner, had a word with music legend **Quincy Jones** at the awards ceremony Monday night.

**Charenee Wade**; third place, **Robin McKelle** (radiant in a show-stopping white-and-fuchsia gown); and second place, **Keilylee Evans**. **Gretchen Parlato** ("I'm still in shock") took top honors.

Another winner: Sen. **Orrin G. Hatch**, Utah Republican, who took home the institute's **Maria Fisher Founders Award** for outstanding contributions to the world of jazz.

Actor **Billy Dee Williams** and the legendary **Quincy Jones**, the night's emcee duo, kept the

momentum flowing.

The evening's most heartfelt moment came from the great singer **Jimmy Scott**, who brought the packed house to its feet with his touching delivery.

VIP guests hobnobbed after the show in the center's atrium, with many speaking highly of the Monk Institute's mission of furthering jazz.

"So many people from the jazz world are here. I don't know when I've heard a better concert," said **Robert G. O'Meally**, director of the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University in New York City.

Others voiced similar sentiments.

"I was glad to be a part of such a glorious occasion, when old and young performers could co-exist," jazz master **Jimmy Heath** said.

Also spotted in the crowd: Sens. **Lamar Alexander** and **John E. Sununu**; Reps. **John Conyers Jr.**, **Harold E. Ford Jr.** and **John D. Dingell**; **Joe Robert** (who hosted Friday's VIP pre-party at Blues Alley); **Ann Jordan**; **Alma Powell**; **Jim Kimsey**; **Bill and Allison Paley**; and the ambassadors of Russia and Kuwait.

— R. Denise Yourse