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MUSIC

Something to warble about

BY ANNE MIDGETTE

Just as there are two kinds of music, in Louis Armstrong's oft-quoted view, there are two kinds of singing: good singing and the other kind.

All the elements of good singing — including connection to the audience, sound vocal technique, emotional honesty — were on offer at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater on Monday night, where the finals of the 2010 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocals Competition and an all-star "Celebration of the Great American Songbook" in-

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Winning sounds

To hear the Monk competition finalists perform, go to washingtonpost.com/style.

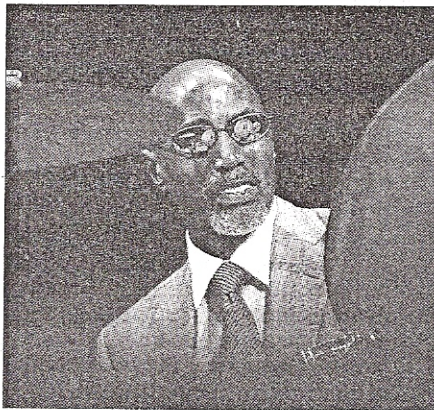
tersected in a single, delectable program.

The roster was a jazz singers' Who's Who. Herbie Hancock and Thelonious Monk Jr. (son of the great jazz pianist and composer), with Phylicia Rashad as moderator, presided over a lineup that included Dee Dee Bridgewater, Dianne Reeves, Al Jarreau, Patti Austin and Kurt Elling — who also served as the competition's judges. The evening was planned

to honor Aretha Franklin, who would have been the sixth judge; but after her son was critically injured in a beating at a gas station in Detroit less than two weeks ago, Franklin opted to stay home. In her stead, Gladys Knight took the stage, to a long ovation, and offered a silky rendition of "Our Love Is Here to Stay."

"I tell y'all right now," she said, "I can't scat." She proceeded to try it, not unimpressively, though breaking off at intervals to protest, "I don't know how to do it!"

MONK CONTINUED ON C2



PHOTOS BY ASTRID RIECKEN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

THE BEAT GOES ON: Thelonious Monk Jr. was among the jazz royalty at the Thelonious Monk jazz vocals finals at the Kennedy Center on Monday. Right, third- and first-place winners Cyrille Aimée and Cécile McLorin Salvant.



21-year-old singer wins Monk vocal competition

MONK FROM C1

There were others who could scat just fine, including the three finalists, selected the day before in a semifinal round of 12 singers. The Monk International Competition focuses on a different instrument every year; voice was last up in 2004. First prize includes a \$20,000 scholarship and a recording contract with Concord Records, but just making it to the final three is a victory; in 1998, the runners-up included Jane Monheit, who has had a fine career and took the stage Monday to sing a gorgeous rendition of "Over the Rainbow" in a voice as soft and yielding as cream. (Tierney Sutton was among that year's semifinalists.)

This year's top three, young women all, showed their stuff to the judges in two numbers each. Twenty-six-year-old Cyrille Aimée, with a voice like fine whiskey — oaky and smooth, with a hint of smokiness — offered a lan-

guid "Ce soir," caressing the French words, and an aggressive "Summertime," both trailing long strands of vocal roulades. Aimée sang in a kind of intimate communion with one raised hand, held before her face, in the stream of her singing, like a trumpet mute, as if to physically shape the sound.

Charenée Wade, 28, who was fourth runner-up at the vocal competition in 2004, also offered a high level of technical polish in a clear voice with strong top notes. All that was unclear were her words, drowned slightly as she held the mike close enough to hear what she was saying in her two numbers, "Mood Indigo" and "The Thrill Is Gone."

Then there was Cécile McLorin Salvant, at 21 still so young as to be slightly coltish, who came out and proclaimed "I've got a secret!" (the intro to the song "If This Isn't Love") with a little girl's fresh excitement. Salvant's



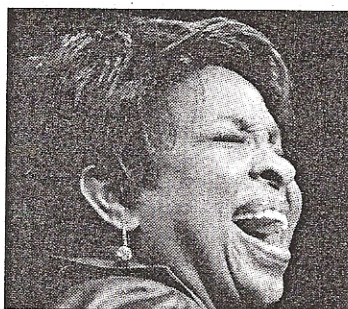
PHOTOS BY ASTRID RIECKEN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

BELIEVE IT: Thelonious Monk jazz vocals winner Cécile McLorin Salvant, 21, gets a hug from judge Dee Dee Bridgewater.

strength is less technical wizardry than straightforward communication. She brought down the house with an aching, husky "I Wonder Where Our Love Has Gone," her voice ranging evenly from booming low notes to quiet upper ones and dropping away, on the final "gone," from the tonic and any hope of a positive resolu-

tion into agonized resignation.

The competition is in part a measure of future promise, Elling said after the show. "It takes a long time to know who you are," he said, adding, "We're looking for people who sound most like themselves." But finding yourself is the culmination of what he called "a marathon of develop-



SHE'S A PIP: Gladys Knight stood in for Aretha Franklin, who was to have been a judge.

ment." Jazz honors the mature.

After the finalists sang, and the young pianist-composer Vadim Neselovskyi performed his BMI Award-winning piece, "Grust" (or "Sadness"), it was the turn of Clark Terry, 89, who came out in a wheelchair, surrounded by talented young students of the Monk Institute. He belied an appearance of frailty with a full-blown and fully enjoyed rendition of his classic song "Mumbles," which involves a lot of scatting in what sounds almost like conversation, but without actual words.

And the judges offered a textbook of expressive types: Bridgewater's voice seamed yet brassy

in "The Surrey With the Fringe on Top," Elling firm and well-crafted as woodwork in "You Don't Know What Love Is," Reeves majestic in "Stormy Weather," and Austin unleashing a fusillade of vocalism in an urgent "Lady Be Good."

The exhilarating second half illustrated how to make music your own but left open the question of how to choose between three very different singers.

They chose the singer who was indeed most herself: Salvant, her liquid eyes brimming with incredulity. (Aimée took third place, Wade second.)

Salvant, born in Miami, was taking a year abroad in Aix-en-Provence as a student of law and political science when she met her current jazz teacher, who persuaded her to stay on in Aix and study with him; she first sang with a band only 2½ years ago. On Monday, she stood onstage between Bridgewater and Reeves, seemingly half in shock, though she roused herself at Elling's instigation and, in her clear, fresh voice, sang the opening phrases of "Blue Skies" like a seasoned pro. Her marathon is just beginning.

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