

NEWS

Terence Blanchard Honored at 2019 Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz Competition & Gala

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Terrance Blanchard, winner of the Maria Fisher Founder's Award, holds the award as Keith David, Lizz Wright, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Cassandra Wilson, and Mitch Landrieu look on during the 2019 Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz International Guitar Competition at the Kennedy Center Eisenhower Theater on Dec. 3, 2019 in Washington, DC.

A formidable collective of Grammy-winning artists in one theater. A tribute to master musical storyteller [Terence Blanchard](#). A dazzling breadth of performances. And one elated master of ceremonies whose name now graces one of the world's premier jazz education organizations for the first time in its 33 years of existence.

Welcome to the 2019 edition of the [Herbie Hancock](#) Institute of Jazz competition and gala.

This year's event, held Tuesday at Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center, spotlighted emerging guitarists and renowned trumpeter, composer and educator Blanchard, who received the Institute's Maria Fisher Founder's Award.

During a conversation hours before receiving his honor, Blanchard, a six-time Grammy winner and the first African-American composer to have an opera staged by New York's Metropolitan Opera, talked to *Billboard* about his approach to music and to life. He comes from a place of "Why not?," he holds curiosity in lofty regard, and he's deeply grateful for the opportunity to create and share impactful music. "It's a gift," he said. "The only way to pay it back is to pay it forward."

Blanchard was also especially pleased to be recognized by the institute's board chair, for whom the former Thelonious Monk-monikered organization was renamed this year.

"Herbie Hancock's been a guiding force in my life for a long time," he said. "He and **Wayne Shorter**. I use them as the model as to what it means to truly be an artist, not just a jazz musician but an artist."

How does Blanchard define artistry? "It's not always about selling records. It's about making statements, and sometimes those statements won't be heard until later years. But it's about speaking your truth and trying to walk in that truth," he said. "I find it liberating to face your faults. For me, being an artist is to face them head on. When people ask me to do projects I have no business doing, I step back and say, 'Maybe I should try it and see what happens.' I don't ever want to be the person to stay in one place."

His relentless momentum often finds Blanchard immersed in two, or 10, projects at the same time. He's scored every **Spike Lee** movie since 1991's *Jungle Fever*, including earning an Oscar nomination for his work on *BlackKkKlansman*. ("There's been a level of trust built up over the years that I have with nobody else," he says), and just wrapped Lee's

latest, *Da 5 Bloods*, a film about Vietnam veterans due on Netflix in 2020. He's generating another round of Oscar buzz with his score to Harriet Tubman biopic *Harriet*, he released his latest album *Up From the Streets* in October, and is performing with several ensembles including his E-Collective outfit that explored racial conflict in the 2105 album *Breathless* and more recently plunged into the effects of gun violence on the album *Live*, recorded at venues in three communities that experienced escalating conflicts between law enforcement and African-American citizens.

Blanchard's second opera, *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, about a young man's struggle with continuing or curtailing the cycle of violence imbued in him growing up in a Louisiana town where slavery's legacy is closely felt, premiered in St. Louis and next will part of The Met's 2020-21 season.

"It blew me away, I had no idea," Blanchard said, of learning he would be the first black composer to have his work featured at The Met. "Everybody's been saying, 'How's that possible?' You'd think in 136 years there's got to be someone else."

In addition to honoring Blanchard at the Kennedy Center, the three guitar finalists -- winnowed down from 12 semifinalists from seven countries on Dec. 2 -- performed two pieces before a judging panel of guitar virtuosos: **Stanley Jordan, Lionel Loueke, Russell Malone, Pat Metheny, Chico Pinheiro, Lee Ritenour** and **John Scofield**. Many of the judges took the stage to play the evening's final number, a dazzling performance of Wes Montgomery's "Four On Six," with Blanchard center stage on trumpet. Blanchard also joined seven of his former Institute students to perform "Soldiers" from *Breathless*.

The judges bestowed the \$30,000 first place scholarship and a recording contract with Concord Records to Moscow's Evgeny Pobozyh and his voracious shredding.

Maximizing the talent at hand, the festivities also included 2018 Fisher honoree [Dee Dee Bridgewater](#), musical director **John Beasley** and trumpeter **Diego Urcola** honoring **Louis Armstrong** with a soulful rendition of "What A Wonderful World." Actor/singer **Keith David** paid homage to the late **Joe Williams** with a segment from David's stage musical *Here's To Life: Joe Williams* that wove narratives from Williams' life with two songs he popularized—"Every Day I Have the Blues" and "Alright, Okay, You Win." **Jane Monheit** and **Antonio Hart** feted Brazilian bossa nova with a performance of **Antonio Carlos Jobim** classic "Chega de Saudade."

Love for Blanchard swelled throughout the evening. **Cassandra Wilson** treated the crowd to soulful version of "On the Sunny Side of the Street" from his 2001 recording *Let's Get*

Lost, and **Lizz Wright** put her lush vocals to work on "Detour Ahead" from Blanchard's 1994 tribute album to **Billie Holiday**. **Mitch Landrieu**, former New Orleans mayor and Louisiana lieutenant governor, showed up to pay tribute to one of his city's favorite sons and praise Blanchard's album *A Tale of God's Will - A Requiem for Katrina*, which musically illustrated Hurricane Katrina's devastating effects.

Proceeds from the event support the Institute's public school education programs in Chicago, Washington, D.C.; Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, Newark, San Francisco and the Mississippi Delta.