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Gordon Wins Monk Sax Competition; Institute Celebrates 10th Anniversary

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Alto saxophonist Jon Gordon took 1st prize of \$20,000 in the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, held Nov. 25 at the Kennedy Center.

Gordon, 29, played three tunes during his 10-minute spot. He opened with "Sicily," an original composition that combined modal sections with changes and included some in-and-out improvisations. A mellow cadenza segued into "Body And Soul," with plenty of implied melody, and Gordon closed with a quick, well-shed rendition of "Giant Steps."

At the post-competition bash, Gordon appeared happy and a bit overwhelmed. "There were some great cats here, and it could have gone a lot of different ways, because there were some guys who really played their asses off," said the New York native, who has recorded five CDs as a leader on independent labels, including the recent release *Witness* (Criss Cross).

Second place (\$10,000) went to tenor saxophonist James Greene Jr. of West Hartford, Conn. Alto player John Wojciechowski, of Detroit, placed third (\$5,000). The three finalists, chosen from 13 semifinalists who performed for judges on Nov. 23, were backed by a house rhythm section of Lewis Nash, Kenny Barron and Christian McBride. Judges were Jimmy Heath, Joe Lovano, Jackie McLean, Wayne Shorter and Joshua Redman, who won the competition five years ago.

"The cats we rated highly, you really heard a concept of exploration and adventure," said Lovano, noting the difficulty of judging a jazz performance. "We tried to hear sincerity in their playing and a range of dynamic power."

After the competition, ABC Television taped the Monk Institute's Tenth Anniversary Jazz Gala concert, scheduled to air at 8 p.m. on Dec. 28 as "Nissan Presents A Celebration Of America's Music." The event featured a huge cast of

big-name jazz and pop musicians and celebrities—including Stevie Wonder, Herbie Hancock, Pat Metheny, Tito Puente, Tony Bennett, Wynton Marsalis, Clark Terry, Joe Williams, Al Grey, Jimmy Heath and k.d. lang plus emcee Bill Cosby, comedian Sinbad and actor Billy Dee Williams—packed into an hour's worth of



Jon Gordon, winner of the 10th-annual Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition. Top: judges Joe Lovano (left), Joshua Redman, Jackie McLean, Wayne Shorter and Jimmy Heath.

TV time. While the event smacked of show biz, complete with dancers for visual effect, it marks the first time such a special has been recorded for prime time TV.

"This is the first step, and it shows people that jazz is an entree into another world," said Redman.

"This is the beginning of jazz coming back to the show business of the entertainment industry," said T.S. Monk. "We can stay intellectually serious, but we've got to have fun doing it." —Ed Enright