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'America's Music' rich with jazz performances

Nissan Presents a Celebration of America's Music
ABC, Saturday, 10 p.m. ET/PT
★★½ (out of four)

By Steve Jones
USA TODAY

America's Music celebrates jazz in the best way possible — by playing it, and keeping chit-chat to a minimum.

Jazz is rarely seen on network TV, but this 1-hour special, honoring the 10th anniversary of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, offers powerful performances by dream combos.

Taped at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, in Washington, D.C., the show teams jazz and pop stars such as Tito Puente, Kenny Burrell, Natalie Cole and James Ingram.

In memory of Miles Davis, members of his last great quintet — saxophonist Wayne Shorter, drummer Tony Williams, keyboardist Herbie Hancock and bassist Ron Carter — reunite, with trumpeter Wallace Roney doing Miles' part. Meanwhile, Louis Armstrong is honored by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, pianist Marcus Roberts, drummer Lewis Nash and bassist Reginald Veal.

Host Bill Cosby thankfully keeps introductions short. Instead, he lets driving sets carry the show, such as

TV PREVIEW



Cosby: Keeps talk to a minimum as host of the Kennedy Center concert.

the big band tribute to Duke Ellington with Stevie Wonder and saxophonist Joshua Redman.

Tony Bennett gets in gear on *I've Got Rhythm*, and k.d. lang and saxophonist Grover Washington Jr. give a moving reading of *Black Coffee*.

The evening's centerpiece is a music-and-photo montage highlighting the achievements of Quincy Jones. But the hour is filled with high notes, and the jazz is always hot.