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## *It's Ladies Night at Monk Jazz Competition*

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Gender-wise, the 2004 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocals Competition was no contest. Women flat-out ruled the two-day event, which was co-hosted by Herbie Hancock and Billy Dee Williams.

Eleven of the 13 semifinalists in this year's jazz vocals competition were women, and neither of the men made it to the finals.

Los Angeles native Gretchen Parlato, 28, took top honors after judges Quincy Jones, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Al Jarreau, Jimmy Scott, Kurt Elling and Flora Purim cast their votes at the Kennedy Center Eisenhower Theater on Monday night.

In addition to receiving a \$20,000 prize, Parlato joins the ranks of pianist Marcus Roberts, saxophonist Joshua Redman and other well-known jazz artists whose recording careers were jump-started by a Monk competition win.



**Winner Gretchen Parlato got \$20,000 and a Kennedy Center gig.**

Parlato didn't have to wait long to reap an unexpected benefit: After listening to her charm the judges and the audience with a sultry rendition of "More Than You Know" and a lithe, scat-laced, tempo-shifting interpretation of "I've Never Been in Love Before," jazz great and Kennedy Center Artistic Director for Jazz Billy Taylor invited her to perform at the venue next season.

Also making a strong impression, albeit in a livelier fashion, were the remaining finalists: Kellylee Evans of Toronto, who took second place; Robin McKelle of Boston, who ranked third; and New Yorker Charenee Wade, the fourth-place winner. They received prizes ranging from \$10,000 to \$2,500. Another \$10,000 prize went to Moscow-born pianist Misha Piatigorsky, recipient of this year's BMI Composers Award.

Approximately 150 vocalists entered this year's contest. No doubt many of them were aware that the Washington-based Monk Institute's last vocals competition, in 1998, helped put singers Jane Monheit and Tierney Sutton on the map—and on the jazz charts. The conclusion of the competition, sponsored by General Motors, drew a capacity crowd to the Kennedy Center, but not everyone came to hear the fledgling vocalists. Capping the event was an all-star concert featuring most of the judges performing with Hancock, pianist George Duke and a stellar lineup of guests that included saxophonists Wayne Shorter and Jimmy Heath and trumpeters Terence Blanchard and Jon Faddis. The performances ranged from the sensuous (Purim's entrancing interpretation of "Dindi") to the manic (Elling and Jarreau's vocalese tribute to Jon Hendricks). Heath and Shorter were in particularly soulful form, but nothing proved more memorable than Scott's stirring rendition of "Motherless Child." Looking frail, the 79-year-old balladeer sat on a stool center stage and sang his shattered heart out.