

Wayne Shorter feted at Kennedy Center

Sax great is saluted by all-star lineup, including Herbie Hancock, at the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz's annual gala at the Kennedy Center

By [George Varga](#) 6:47 P.M. SEPT. 17, 2013



Wayne

Shorter receives the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Lifetime Achievement Award from Herbie Hancock surrounded by Wayne's band members Brian Blade, John Patitucci, Danilo Perez, trumpeter Roy Hargrove and members of the band Take 6. *AP Photo*

WASHINGTON, D.C. — On Dec. 8, jazz-and-beyond icon Herbie Hancock will join former Tijuana guitar-slinger Carlos Santana as one of the five 2013 recipients of this year's Kennedy Center Honors.

On Monday night, Hancock was on stage at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, but not as an honoree.

Instead, he was on hand to salute fellow jazz-and-beyond icon Wayne Shorter and to present the

legendary saxophonist, composer and band leader with the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz's Lifetime Achievement Award. The presentation came during the UCLA-based Institute's 27th annual gala concert and international competition, which this year fittingly focused on saxophonists from around the world. The 2011 edition saw San Diego pianist Joshua White win second place honors, along with lavish praise from Hancock.

Shorter, who is 80-going-on-18, is only the second artist in the Institute's nearly three decades to receive the Lifetime Achievement Award. Quincy Jones, in 1996, was the first.

"What is music for? What is anything for? Tonight's man of the hour has spent a lifetime exploring these questions," Hancock said as he began his tribute to Shorter, with whom he first collaborated when both were members of the fabled Miles Davis Quintet of the 1960s.

Hancock then posed another question: "How do I – how does anyone – describe one of the most seminal and pivotal artists in jazz?"

He went on to describe Shorter as a "visionary," an accolade that will likely also be directed at Hancock when he receives his Kennedy Center Honors in December. Referring to Shorter's often cathartic artistic approach, Hancock stated one of the saxophonist's longtime imperatives:

" 'The purpose of jazz is to remind us to be free' ... (Wayne) and his music are inseparable. From simple innocence to ferocious power, he captures our imagination and doesn't let go. The intimacy of his (musical) voice comes through loud and clear. His compositions sound like prayers. Safe is not part of his musical vocabulary. Everything he does is an adventure. So, sit back and behold the work of a master and prepare to be blown away." 742-2035

Accordingly, several different all-star bands, which were put together for the gala and spanned several generations, then performed selections from various phases of Shorter's career. Keyboardist John Beasley served as the musical director.

"Black Nile" saw Jimmy Heath, a longtime colleague of the late San Diego sax great James Moody, team up with a group that included young piano phenom Gerald Clayton, trumpeter Roy Hargrove and drummer T.S. Monk, the son of Thelonious Monk and a driving force of the Institute named after his father. They were then joined by Kurt Elling, who sang Shorter's "Dolores Dream" with impressive verve. Monk and actor Billy Dee Williams served as the gala's co-hosts.

Hargrove remained on stage to perform a sparkling medley of "Fall" and "Footprints" as part of an ensemble that also featured Hancock on piano and Branford Marsalis on drums. Shorter's tenure in the pioneering fusion band Weather Report was saluted with a performance of the propulsive "Palladium," which paired the vocal group Take 6 with a band that included former Miles Davis bassist Marcus Miller and former Frank Zappa drummer Vinnie Colaiuta.

But the highlight came when Shorter took the stage to give his acceptance speech and perform with his superb quartet.

"When you write a letter or book, or make a film, or write a (musical) composition or a poem, try to create how you wish the world to be for eternity, taking off the layers and becoming what we really are, eternally," said Shorter, who at 80 has lost none of his drive to innovate and explore new creative terrain.

Shorter and his band then performed the majestic “Over Shadow Hill Way” and the aptly titled “Joy Rider,” both of which sounded like miniature suites. Together with pianist Danilo Perez, bassist John Patitucci and ace drummer Brian Blade, Shorter seamlessly shifted from section to section on the two pieces, which showcased both his soaring soprano sax work and his group’s seemingly telepathic degree of instrumental communication.

When Hancock subsequently hailed the band as “Wayne’s greatest quartet ever,” it seemed like simply a statement of fact. Following a tribute to recently deceased keyboardist and composer George Duke, who rose to fame in the early 1970s as a member of former San Diegan Zappa’s band, the concert concluded with many of the evening’s performers joining forces to play Heath’s ebullient “Gingerbread Boy.”

The first half of the concert was divided between performances by vocal wizard of awes Cassandra Wilson and ace guitarist Robben Ford and a showcase for the Institute’s three 2013 saxophone competition finalists. The winner was Melissa Aldana of Santiago, Chile. At 24, she played with poise, panache and a sophistication well beyond her years as she delivered a rhapsodic version of the Jimmy Van Heusen ballad "I Thought About You" and her own "Free Fall," which showed her to be as skilled a writer and arranger as she is a saxophonist.

Aldana, a New York resident since 2009, has made two albums to date.

Her first-place finish brought with it a \$25,000 scholarship and an album contract with Concord Records. Second place went to Tivon Pennicott, 27, of Marietta, Georgia, while third place went to Godwin Louis, 28, of Harlem, New York. The judges included Shorter and fellow sax luminaries Heath, Marsalis, Jane Ira Bloom and Bobby Watson.

"The future of jazz is in very good hands," said Hancock, like Shorter a longtime instructor for the Institute.

The gala, which was sponsored by Cadillac, also featured the Monk Institute's Jazz Performance Program College Students Ensemble and its Performing Arts High School All-Star Jazz Sextet.