In the Neighborhood

Thelonious Monk and Nina Simone Converge at Lincoln Square

Monk lived at 170 West End Avenue from 1964 to 1972

Monk moved to 243 West 63rd Street in 1926

Simone moved to Lincoln Plaza in 1971

David Geffen Hall
Lincoln Square, and San Juan Hill before it, has long been a home for New York City artists. Among the luminaries who have resided in the area are:

Toshiko Akiyoshi
James Baldwin
Leon Bismark “Bix” Beiderbecke
Leonard Bernstein
Enrico Caruso
Adolphus “Doc” Cheatham
John Coltrane
Aaron Copeland
Miles Davis
Gerry Mulligan
Lester “Les” Elgart
Duke Ellington
Mischa Elman
Geraldine Farrar
José Feliciano
Maynard Ferguson
Roberta Flack
Alma Gluck
Neal Hefti
Billie Holiday

Lena Horne
Thad Jones
Jaime Laredo
Ted Lewis
Felipe Luciano
Herbie Mann
Lauritz Melchior
Yehudi Menuhin
Irving Milfred “Miff” Mole
Thelonious Monk
Itzhak Perlman
Sergei Rachmaninoff
Max Roach
Budu Sayao
Nina Simone
Isaac Stern
Billy Strayhorn
Arturo Toscanini
Teddy Wilson
Ephraim Zimbalist Sr.

Adapted from a list by Peter Salwen, *Upper West Side Story: A History and Guide*
Most neighborhoods are rich or poor, artistic or commercial, Latino or Black, Jewish, Irish, Italian, or Haitian, small-town or cosmopolitan; the West Side contrives to be all of them at once. Raphael Soyer, at eighty-nine, was still painting in a studio at Columbus and 74th. “Whenever I walk along Columbus Avenue,” he said shortly before his death in 1988, “I always look at the people. I rarely go to the zoo or theater; the streets of New York, the parks of New York—these are my theater.”

Peter Salwen
*Upper West Side Story: A History and Guide*
San Juan Hill is remembered for its many contributions to American musical culture. In particular, the stride piano technique, which emerged around 1919, has reverberated around the world. Stride brought a new, distinct style of improvisation to piano, and many of the top stride pianists—James “Fats” Waller, James P. Johnson, Willie “The Lion” Smith—had connections to San Juan Hill. Stride figured prominently in the Swing Era of jazz music, spanning roughly 1930 to 1945.
Musical theater was also significant in the area. Often hailed as the first all-Black Broadway production, *Shuffle Along* premiered to great success in 1921 at the 63rd Street Theatre. *Runnin’ Wild*, which featured the Charleston, with music by James P. Johnson, opened in 1923 at the New Colonial Theatre at 1887 Broadway. These successes belied the fact that the theater world remained racially exploitative, continuing to employ blackface tropes, exaggerated dialect, and stereotyping.
Performance venues around San Juan Hill had precarious existences, regularly changing ownership, names, and purpose. Several theaters in the neighborhood, including the Lincoln Square Theatre and the 63rd Street Theatre, were demolished in the late 1950s. More informal performance spaces like the Jungles Casino were located in tenement basements, and disappeared by the 1940s as much of the neighborhood was razed to build the Amsterdam Houses.
In 1910, San Juan Hill was still the largest Black community in Manhattan. A few years later, it would be surpassed by Harlem, although when the Monks arrived in 1922 it was still mostly Black—at least off the avenues. Only whites, mostly Irish, Germans, and Italians, lived along the avenues—Amsterdam (Tenth) and West End (Eleventh)—and on certain streets. West 61st, 62nd, and 63rd Streets were all-Black.

Robin D.G. Kelley
*Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Radical*
Most of San Juan Hill’s Blacks hailed from the South or the Caribbean. On Monk’s block in 1930, for example, about forty percent of the residents were Southern-born (primarily from Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia), and about twenty percent came from British West Indies and, to a lesser extent, Cuba and Puerto Rico. About thirty-five percent were born in New York City, a figure that also reflects the fairly large youth population in the neighborhood.

Robin D.G. Kelley
_Thelonious Monk: The Life and Times of an American Radical_
Growing up, Thelonious Monk honed his skills through apartment jam sessions and “cutting contests” with James P. Johnson and others, transforming Johnson’s stride techniques with his own unique spin. As a boy, Monk took piano lessons informed by stride, receiving regular lessons from Alberta Simmons, a fellow neighborhood resident who was an accompanist for Fats Waller. Monk made his professional debut in 1939, and by 1941 had been hired as the house pianist at Minton’s Playhouse in Harlem.
You want to know what sound
    I put into my music—
Well, you have to go and listen for yourself.
I can’t describe them.
How do you expect me
To describe to you right here
How New York sounds?

Thelonious Monk

I came up in the New York streets.
There were all different types of people.
Every block in New York was a different city.
Each block was a different town.
Have this on that block and something else
on the next block—
That’s the way it goes.

Thelonious Monk
Today, Thelonious Monk is often recognized as one of the originators of bebop, a foundational style of modern jazz. Artists who exemplified the style include Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane. Bebop emerged in clubs around New York City in the 1940s and is known for its sparse and dissonant mix of composition and improvisation.

Thelonious Monk performs with trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie in 1971
Venues like the Five Spot Cafe in Greenwich Village began featuring jazz artists as the genre’s popularity grew. Nina Simone began her career in New York playing gigs in the Village, and both she and Monk often played at the same venues and for the same audiences who, in Simone’s words, “moved between jazz and folk scenes.” The artists appeared on the same bill at a concert in 1960 at Town Hall.
Nina Simone’s Lincoln Square

Nina Simone moved to Lincoln Square in the early 1970s after several years of living in Mount Vernon, New York. She was newly separated from her husband and manager, Andy Stroud. The neighborhood she came to know was quite different than Thelonious Monk’s San Juan Hill, but the Upper West Side was still in midst of rapid change.
Simone and Monk were both born in North Carolina. African Americans from the South were accustomed to both tight knit, multiracial housing and de facto segregation. In this way, the residential patterns of neighborhoods like San Juan Hill and Lincoln Square were not unlike their small hometowns.

[T]here wasn’t a Black side of town: it was more like a series of circles around the centre with Blacks or whites living in these circles. And a few Blacks, a few, lived almost in the centre, almost in the white areas. It was a checkerboard type of living, with areas that were totally white and few pockets of Blacks.

Nina Simone on growing up in Tryon, North Carolina
Nina Simone took up residence at One Lincoln Plaza in 1971, one of many new luxury apartment complexes that were arising in the neighborhood.

Thelonious Monk, too, remained in Lincoln Square through the early 1970s. He had moved his family in 1964 from the Phipps Houses on West 63rd Street to a apartment in Lincoln Towers, which had been built as part of the Lincoln Square Urban Renewal Project.
The New Neighborhood Sounds

Lincoln Center’s venues began opening in the 1960s, beginning with Philharmonic Hall, the new home for the New York Philharmonic, in September 1962. The New York State Theater opened in 1964, followed by the Metropolitan Opera House (1966) and Alice Tully Hall and the Juilliard School (1969). As these venues began offering programs, contributions reflecting the earlier, diverse neighborhood were largely absent.
Before the venues were constructed, the Emergency Committee for Unity on Social and Economic Problems had called on Lincoln Center to establish a venue to highlight Black contributions to American music (a “Palace of Jazz”) alongside its planned “Palaces of Opera and Ballet,” in addition to advocating for equitable hiring for construction crews.
Toward New Programming

The new, modern home for the arts in New York City stood ready to be filled by the artists who would help define it. Through the 1960s and 1970s, musicians unable to gain access to stages except through outside bookings expanded ideas of what was possible at Lincoln Center. Audiences rewarded them, and the institution expanded its early ideals of service to meet the times.
The Advisory Committee on Jazz and Folk Music was formed to select nonclassical bookings in Philharmonic Hall, although those were limited to ‘serious artists’ who had a ‘creative point of view’, as reported by *The New York Times*.

The advisory committee has dedicated itself to a concern for true creativity and for the audience. It hopes that both impresarios and artists will bring to Lincoln Center carefully prepared, well-presented programs devoted to the past, present, and future of both art forms. It intends to recommend against those that do not measure up to these standards. The committee, in truth, can do no more nor less than will that final and true judge of any concert, the audience.

Russell Sanjek
“Jazz, Folk Music and Lincoln Center,” Philharmonic Hall house program, November 1, 1962
1962–1971

Selected Bookings in Philharmonic Hall

1962
Mahalia Jackson
Benny Goodman
Dizzy Gillespie
Mary Lou Williams
The Weavers

1963
Joan Baez
Count Basie
Diahann Carroll
Thelonious Monk
John Coltrane

1964
Miles Davis
Theodore Bikel
Dave Brubeck Quartet
Bob Dylan

1965
The Supremes
Duke Ellington

1966
Peter, Paul and Mary
Nina Simone
Jackie Wilson

1967
Miriam Makeba
Simon & Garfunkel
Pearl Bailey
Nina Simone
Buffy Sainte-Marie
Mahalia Jackson
Hugh Masekela
Aretha Franklin
Ella Fitzgerald

1968
John Coltrane
The Lovin’ Spoonful
Shirley Verrett
Count Basie
Benny Goodman
Hugh Masekela
Richie Havens
Aretha Franklin
Jimi Hendrix Experience

1969
Miriam Makeba
Stevie Wonder
Nina Simone
Richie Havens
Peter, Paul and Mary
Miriam Makeba
Dionne Warwick

1970
Aretha Franklin
Roberta Flack

1971
The Bee Gees
Isaac Hayes
The Kinks
Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie
The Bee Gees
Nina Simone
Cat Stevens
Melba Moore
Richie Havens
Miles Davis
Curtis Mayfield
Thelonious Monk performs at Philharmonic Hall on December 30, 1963.

Philharmonic Hall has announced new dates for performances postponed because of the death of President Kennedy.

The appearance of the folk singing group, The Brothers Four, scheduled for last Friday (November 22) has been postponed. A new date will be announced later. The Young People's Concert of the New York Philharmonic scheduled for last Saturday (November 23) will be held this Saturday (November 30) at noon.

The opening of the Concert Opera Association season with a performance of Wagner's "Rienzi," originally scheduled for Monday night (November 25) will take place on Friday (November 29) at 8:00 p.m. And Thelonious Monk and his orchestra, whose appearance was scheduled for this Friday (November 29), has been rescheduled for Monday, December 30, at 8:30 p.m.

The management of Philharmonic Hall expresses its appreciation to Mr. Monk and his producer, Jules Colomby, for their cooperation in agreeing to the postponement of their concert.

Tickets for the November 29 Thelonious Monk concert will be honored on December 30. Tickets for last Monday night's Concert Opera Association's scheduled performance will be honored this Friday.
For Monk, the pleasure of playing in Philharmonic Hall was mainly geographical. The hall was built three blocks from the home he has occupied for nearly 40 years, and Monk serenely regards the choice of the site as a favor to him from the city fathers, a personal convenience, along with the new bank and the other refinements that urban renewal has brought to his old turf. The neighborhood, in Manhattan’s West 60s, is called San Juan Hill. It is one of the oldest and most decent of the city’s [Black] ghettos.

Barry Farrell
Time Magazine, February 28, 1964
That was my first time playing at the Philharmonic Hall and that was, like, a big deal....Only the New York Philharmonic plays there....[I]t was really funny...when we walked away from that concert, we were all dejected and disappointed. We thought we had really bombed...but then we listened to the record—it sounded fantastic!

Herbie Hancock
Pianist in Miles Davis Quintet, 1964
*Miles Davis: The Definitive Biography*, by Ian Carr
1966

At Nina Simone’s first Lincoln Center performance in late 1966, she played her signature style of jazz on piano, and also sang. Her lyrics spoke about injustice and the growing civil rights movement in the U.S. The poet Langston Hughes, an early champion of Simone’s music whose poem “Backlash Blues” she later adapted into song, congratulated her on her debut at Philharmonic Hall.

Langston Hughes telegram to Nina Simone at Philharmonic Hall, November 22, 1966. Langston Hughes Papers, James Weldon Johnson Collection in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Courtesy of the Langston Hughes estate
It was at this time, in the mid-sixties, that I first began to feel the power and spirituality I could connect with when I played in front of an audience. I’d been performing for ten years, but it was only at this time that I felt a kind of state of grace come upon me on those occasions when everything fell into place. At such times I would give a concert that everyone who witnessed it would remember for years, and they would go home afterwards knowing that something very special had happened.

Nina Simone
By the early 1970s, Lincoln Center leadership made the Center’s founding ideals of public service more explicitly connected to the pursuit of diverse audiences.

I said, “in the sense that chamber music is worthy of a program, jazz is a much more purely American product, and is worthy of some recognition at this level.” I had put together two or three programs, proposals, and had offered them forward...and eventually we got...Ellington, we had Basie, we had the major bands, as they now exist.

Oral history interview with Leonard de Paur
First Director of Community Relations, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts
June 1, 1990
“Pop Concerts in Philharmonic Hall” memo by Philharmonic Hall manager, Patrick McGinnis

Public service also includes service to the Black Community and our pop concerts are the only truly integrated audience we have.

—Patrick McGinnis
Lincoln Center began to partner with the Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center, hosting its annual benefit, Square at the Center, in this hall starting in 1966. Like other settlement houses, the Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center offered young people access to summer camps, after-school activities, and other programs aimed at families.

The annual benefit featured performances by young people from the Neighborhood Center as well as local and national talent.
As the Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center benefits grew, they attracted high profile supporters including Angela Lansbury, Shirley Chisholm, Jules Irving, and Nelson Rockefeller. Tickets were offered in tiered pricing levels to allow all to attend.
...[The Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center benefits] brought the people from the neighborhood into Lincoln Center. Even though they lived right across the street from it, they had never been inside Avery Fisher Hall or anywhere else, probably, in Lincoln Center. So that was one thing that helped to break down some of the negative feelings that some of the people in the neighborhood might have had.

Oral history interview with Carlos Morales
Former Director of Lincoln Square Neighborhood Center
April 24, 1991
1972–1973

Soul at the Center, a two-week showcase of Black arts presented by Lincoln Center, was the biggest indication of changed programming efforts. The lineup included a broad array of large and small acts across Black arts and culture.
This effort was led by an outside organizer, Ellis Haizlip, and supported by Lincoln Center staff and leadership. Ellis Haizlip hosted the variety show *SOUL!*, which ran from 1968 to 1973. Gerry Bledsoe, a radio host, joined the effort with Haizlip for the 1973 event.
Presently “Soul” is in vogue. I do hope that this time we are able to fill some of these dignified and solemn buildings we are being offered with vibrations so strong, so mean, that never will another enter without acknowledging our presence here. Throughout this series of “Soul at the Center” please remember that.

Ellis Haizlip, “A Note From the Producer,” Philharmonic Hall house program, July 23, 1972
Lincoln Center leadership met with religious leaders in New York’s Black community in the lead up to the 1972 Soul at the Center.
The 1972 series was successful enough to continue for a second year in 1973. A third Soul at the Center series was considered for 1974, but was limited by financial challenges. Instead of continuing, a decision was made to integrate more diverse program offerings at Lincoln Center overall.
Soul at the Center included the *New York Amsterdam News* among its co-producers. The paper was founded in San Juan Hill in 1909 and named after Amsterdam Avenue.

“Soul at the Center” is grateful to Clarence Jones, publisher of the NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS, for special participation in the support and promotion of these concerts.
The Black press recognized and covered Lincoln Center’s efforts to book and produce events of interest to the surrounding neighborhood.

The Newport Jazz Festival came to New York City in 1972, bringing a range of high-profile jazz artists to this hall and other venues around the city for several summers through the 1970s. The breadth of jazz acts and the festival’s popularity demonstrated the public’s enthusiasm for the genre at Lincoln Center, including at the new Out-of-Doors Festival.
Thelonious Monk’s 1975 performance in this hall is among his last public performances before his death in 1982. He did not perform in the last six years of his life.
Nina Simone performed at Lincoln Center for a final time as part of the Kool Jazz Festival in June 1985.
Robust and Intimate
Legacies

Jazz is America musically.
It's all jazz, everywhere
—Thelonious Monk

I wish I knew how
It would feel to be free
I wish I could break
All the chains holding me
—Nina Simone

Original lyrics by Billy Taylor, 1967
1987

The Classical Jazz program at Lincoln Center began in 1987, presenting a program devoted to Thelonious Monk in August of that year.
A longer program of Monk’s work was performed in August 1993.
Jazz at Lincoln Center became a constituent of Lincoln Center in 1996. In October 2004, the organization established its permanent home at Columbus Circle and 59th Street in a newly built, three-hall venue called Frederick P. Rose Hall. This new home was dubbed the House of Swing by Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis, in an homage to the area’s deep jazz roots.
“The whole place is dedicated to the feeling of swing, which is a feeling of extreme coordination,” explained Jazz at Lincoln Center’s Managing and Artistic Director Wynton Marsalis of his vision for the new home of jazz, or the “House of Swing.”

“Everything is integrated: the relationship between one space and another, the relationship between the audience and the musicians, is one fluid motion, because that’s how our music is.”

*History of Jazz at Lincoln Center, jazz.org/history*
The bass player and singer Meshell Ndegeocello performed songs from her 2012 tribute album to Nina Simone during her 2015 American Songbook performance.
The Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra played their first full program in tribute to Monk in October 2018. The orchestra plans to add all 72 of Monk’s works to its repertoire.

THE JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA PLAYS MONK

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra
TED NASH, Music Director, Alto Saxophone
WYNTON MARSALIS, Trumpet
RYAN KISER, Trumpet
KENNY RAMPTON, Trumpet
MARCUS PRINTUP, Trumpet
VINCENT GARDNER, Trombone
CHRIS CRENshaw, Trombone
ELLIOT MASON, Trombone
SHERMAN IRBY, Alto Saxophone
VICTOR GOMES, Tenor Saxophone
CAMILLE THURMAN, Tenor Saxophone
PAUL MEDZELA, Baritone Saxophone
DAN NIXMIR, Piano
CARLOS HENRIQUEZ, Bass

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday Evening, October 26-27, 2018, at 8:00
Wynton Marsalis, Managing and Artistic Director
Greg Scholl, Executive Director

This program is presented as part of the Ertegun Jazz Concert Series.

There will be one 15-minute intermission during this performance.

To be selected from the following:

THELONIOUS MONK
Eronel
arranged by Victor Goines

THELONIOUS MONK
Friday the 13th
arranged by Kenny Rampton

THELONIOUS MONK
Jackie-ing
arranged by Ted Nash

THELONIOUS MONK
Left’s Cool One
arranged by Marcus Printup

THELONIOUS MONK
Little Rottie Tootie
arranged by Emilien Callejo

THELONIOUS MONK
Misterioso
arranged by JiHy Lee

THELONIOUS MONK
North of the Sunset
arranged by Matt Holzherr

THELONIOUS MONK
Oo Mocor
arranged by Wynton Marsalis

THELONIOUS MONK
Ruby, My Dear
arranged by Joseph Block

THELONIOUS MONK
Shuffle Ball
arranged by Ali Jackson

THELONIOUS MONK
Ugly Beauty
arranged by Wynton Marsalis

THELONIOUS MONK
Well, You Needn’t
arranged by Sherman Irby
The acclaimed saxophone player Kamasi Washington has suggested that Monk’s influence on jazz is too large to measure. If you’re a jazz musician and you think you’re not influenced by Thelonious Monk, either you’re not a jazz musician, or you are influenced by Thelonious Monk.

Kamasi Washington
Mahogany L. Browne, Lincoln Center’s 2022 poet-in-residence, underscores the personal relationship many artists have with Simone.

today, i am a black woman in a body of coal
i am always burning and no one knows my name
i am a nameless fury, i am a blues scratched from
the throat of ms. nina—

Mahogany L. Browne
Excerpt from *litany*
Thelonious Monk

“The High Priest of Bebop”
October 10, 1917 – February 17, 1982
Nina Simone

“The High Priestess of Soul”
February 21, 1933 – April 21, 2003