

Initiated in 1982, the NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship is the nation's highest honor given to those who have devoted their lives and careers to jazz, an art form uniquely rooted in American history and culture. Described by the *New York Times* as a "rare public accolade for jazz," the recipients range from vocalists and percussionists to vibraphonists and saxophonists to advocates of the music—all of whom have advanced the art form through their commitment to jazz.

Number of
NEA Jazz Masters
Fellowships,
1982-2020:

157

HONORING THE MASTERS

NEA Jazz Masters are living legends who have made major contributions to jazz, including

- Toshiko Akiyoshi
- Carla Bley
- Dee Dee Bridgewater
- Dave Brubeck
- Miles Davis
- Paquito D'Rivera
- Ella Fitzgerald
- Abbey Lincoln
- Pat Metheny
- Eddie Palmieri
- Sonny Rollins
- Cecil Taylor

The National Endowment for the Arts recognizes up to four artists each year, with each receiving a one-time fellowship of up to \$25,000.

In 2004, the Arts Endowment inaugurated the A.B. Spellman NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship for Jazz Advocacy, given to an individual whose passion for jazz and its artists has been demonstrated through major contributions to the appreciation, knowledge, and advancement of the music. Recipients include

- Critic Nat Hentoff
- Jazz club owner Lorraine Gordon
- Musicians' advocate Wendy Oxenhorn
- Recording engineer Rudy Van Gelder
- Producer and pianist George Wein

Fellowships are awarded to living individuals on the basis of nominations from the public including the jazz community. Nominations are judged by a panel of experts, including administrators, performers, producers, and a knowledgeable layperson. The NEA encourages nominations of a broad range of men and women who have been significant to the field of jazz, through vocals and instrumental performance, creative leadership, and education.

CONNECTING THE MASTERS TO THE AUDIENCES

Each year's artists are honored at a tribute concert that is open to the public and streamed online and radio broadcast. The concert features musical and spoken tributes to each incoming NEA Jazz Master and are available to watch as an archive.

In addition, the NEA Jazz Masters participate in events such as listening parties and master classes to deepen awareness of their significance with the general public and enable music students to take advantage of mentorship opportunities with the artists.

CREATING AND SHARING CONTENT

The National Endowment for the Arts website contains a wealth of free jazz content.

AUDIO

- [Jazz Moments](#): More than 350 short audio clips of musical excerpts and interviews with and about NEA Jazz Masters such as:
 - Carla Bley on Miles Davis and moving to NYC,
 - Branford Marsalis reflecting on being a bad student,
 - Herbie Hancock and the popularity of his composition *Watermelon Man*,
 - Dr. Lonnie Smith on the sweet sound of the organ.
- [Podcasts](#): One-on-one interviews with NEA Jazz Masters (each ~30 minutes long)

VIDEO

- **Video interviews** with NEA Jazz Masters running approximately five minutes.
- **Concerts and excerpts** from 2014 - 2019.

The NEA also supported the [Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program](#), an effort to document the lives and careers of NEA Jazz Masters. In addition to transcriptions of the comprehensive interviews, the website also includes audio clips with interview excerpts. This project has transcribed the oral histories of nearly 100 NEA Jazz Masters.

