



## Vocalist wins \$20,000 in scholarship and a record deal with Concord Music Group

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By Lee Mergner

Vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant, from Miami, Fla., won the Thelonious Monk Competition for Jazz Vocals. Ms. Salvant competed against other finalists Charenée Wade and Cyrille Aimée, who finished in second and third place, respectively. Each won scholarship money of varying levels, but Salvant also received a record deal with the Concord Music Group. The Competition was held at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

Salvant, who was one of the crowd favorites during the Semi-finals held the day before. For her Finals performance, she sang two ballads - "If This Isn't Love" and "I Wonder Where Our Love Has Gone." Each contestant performed two songs of their own choosing, backed by a trio of Reggie Thomas on piano, Rodney Whitaker on bass and Carl Allen on drums.

The event at the Kennedy Center also included a Gala concert, featuring a tribute to the Great American Songbook. Each of the judges for the competition - Patti Austin, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Kurt Elling, Al Jarreau and Dianne Reeves - came out to perform one standard. They were backed by a revolving cast of all-star musicians, including Herbie Hancock, George Duke, Terri Lyne Carrington, Wayne Shorter, Kevin Eubanks, James Genus, Terence Blanchard and Jimmy Heath, plus a few former Monk Competition winners such as Jon Irabagon, Ben Williams and Ambrose Akinshire. Ledisi also sang one number and, in a special performance, 90-year-old Clark Terry, wheelchair-bound but plenty frisky, reprised his famous "Mumbles" song.

Gladys Knight filled in for Aretha Franklin, who was unable to attend as judge and honoree due to the condition of her son, who is recovering from injuries sustained in a beating. Knight told the audience that although she loved jazz, she couldn't scat. She then proceeded to sing a swinging version of "Our Love Is Here to Stay" and during George Duke's solo even threw in some wordless notes in soulful approximation of scat.

In addition, pianist Vadim Neselovskyi performed his composition "Grust," which won the BMI Composer's Competition. Neselovskyi, who was born in the Ukraine and studied at Berklee College of Music, was a member of Gary Burton's band. He won \$10,000 for the composition, which means "sadness" in Russian.

The event was hosted by Herbie Hancock, T.S. Monk, Phylicia Rashad and Billy Dee Williams. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made an appearance to present the third place award.

*JazzTimes'* managing editor Evan Haga will be writing a more complete review of the event in our upcoming Dec. issue. For more information about the Thelonious Monk Institute and its programs, go to its [web site](#).