



For Immediate Release
Date

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WBGO's Champions of Jazz Gala Celebrated Ray Charles and Honored Ron Delsener and Donald Fagen

New York — Maverick promoter **Ron Delsener** and co-founder and lead singer of Steely Dan **Donald Fagen** were honored at the **WBGO Champions of Jazz Gala**, on Tuesday, May 1, 2018. With the glittering backdrop of Columbus Circle and Central Park, a once-in-a-lifetime concert took place in the Appel Room at **Jazz at Lincoln Center's** Frederick P. Rose Hall, all to raise funds for **WBGO**, Newark Public Radio.

Both Fagen and Delsener have a great love of Ray Charles, and the evening honoring them reflected that by recreating Ray Charles's set from a show in Central Park presented by Delsener in 1968. Performers included: **Jeff Beck, Donald Fagen, Maceo Parker, Catherine Russell, Carolyn Leonhart, La Tanya Hall, Russell Malone, Rob Paparozzi, Christian Sands, Keyon Harrold, Bernard Purdie, Ron Blake, Richie Goods** and **Billy Kilson**, all led by Music Director **Michael Leonhart**. From the stage, Delsener reflected on that 1968 Ray Charles performance, remembering how police were searching under the stage following a bomb threat. That night, fifty years ago, Charles evacuated, the show ended, and Delsener scheduled a second performance for those who held the original \$1 ticket.

Something truly special happens when talent of this caliber come together to celebrate icons in the music industry. From the impromptu jam session after the rehearsal, to the collection of industry leaders who attended, there was a magic buzzing through the air and between the notes.

Hosts of WBGO's *Rhythm Revue* and *Afternoon Jazz* (Saturdays on WBGO 88.3FM), **Felix Hernandez** and **Monifa Brown** - who both incorporate Ray Charles regularly into their programs – presided over the evening. They were joined by *Portraits in Blue* and *Saturday Morning Function* host, **Bob Porter**, who has a long history both as an

author and producer of many legendary blues and soul recordings. In attendance were leadership from **MSG, Prudential Center, LiveNation, ASCAP, Blue Note Clubs, City Winery** and others.

For 39 years, WBGO's mission has been to educate, entertain and inspire the public by providing access and opportunity to the highest quality, curated jazz and blues programming produced in the jazz capital of the world. WBGO continues to grow through the collaboration and support of members around the globe.

WBGO Jazz 88.3 FM and WBGO.org believe in the vibrancy and significance of jazz as America's gift to world culture. The proceeds raised at the Annual Champions of Jazz Gala help WBGO continue its mission to ensure the future of this art form while paying tribute to individuals and organizations for their outstanding humanitarian, civic and artistic contributions to both jazz and our world.

IMAGES AVAILABLE

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Founded in 1979, WBGO is a publicly-supported cultural institution that preserves and elevates America's music: jazz and blues. WBGO reaches a weekly audience of more than 400,000 in the New York/New Jersey metro area via 88.3FM. Through programs such as Jazz Night in America, produced in partnership with NPR and Jazz at Lincoln Center, and WBGO's position as content provider to NPR, its reach extends to millions more across the country. From its home base of Newark, New Jersey, Public Radio station WBGO has long been an anchor institution in community engagement through its partnerships, concerts, education and news programming.