

Aging challenges musicians, says Ellis Marsalis

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Renowned jazz pianist Ellis Marsalis talks about his lengthy career and the challenges of aging for musicians at a Tulane event on Thursday (Feb. 18). Marsalis also performs on the uptown campus each fall. (Photo by Sally Asher)

Famed New Orleans jazz musician Ellis Marsalis stepped away from his typical perch in front of piano on Thursday (Feb. 18) to discuss his long career and how aging affects musicians in a talk sponsored by the Tulane University [Center for Aging](#).

He took questions from the audience at Rogers Memorial Chapel on the uptown campus and also from moderator Penny Roberts, a student in the center's [interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in aging studies](#).

The 82-year-old patriarch of the talented Marsalis music family, who was born in New Orleans, said took his first music lessons at the Xavier University junior school of music.

"I think I was 11 years old," he recalled. "I had a penchant for jazz music, which didn't go over too well with the nuns at Xavier," drawing chuckles from the audience.

Reflecting on his life now, Marsalis said that touring "is definitely more difficult as you get older, especially in my case. I was never one to go to the gym as often as I could."

He also appreciates assistance he gets from members of his family, who often perform with him. His sons are renowned jazz

musicians and recording artists Jason, Wynton, Branford and Delfeayo Marsalis.

“Does New Orleans take care of its aging musicians?” Roberts asked.

“New Orleans doesn’t take care of anybody, not only aging musicians,” Marsalis said, and he had a suggestion: “If the city had budget money, it could hire musicians to play in various places. That would help musicians,” who have trouble finding full-time opportunities to perform.

The city’s history as a birthplace of traditional jazz music does have its positive side, however. “One advantage musicians have in this town, you can extend your performance life by playing jobs like traditional jazz” at venues such as [Preservation Hall](#) and the [Palm Court Jazz Café](#).

“Traditional New Orleans jazz is very much alive,” he said.

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Ellis Marsalis