



Jazz Notes: Donald Byrd Street, Lana and Wendell, Tain Watts

9/7/2017, 3:37 p.m.

It is a big deal when the arranger, composer and trumpeter Donald Byrd, a native of Detroit, is so loved and respected in New York that a street is named in his honor.

Sept. 9, the Donald Byrd Cultural Foundation will host a street “renaming” ceremony for Byrd, aka Donald Byrd and the Blackbyrds, at Teasdale Place and Boston Road between 163rd and 164 streets off Third Avenue, Bronx, N.Y. (11 a.m.-12:30 p.m.).

In the 1950s, Byrd and a young pianist, Herbie Hancock, got an apartment together on Boston Road and 164th Street in the Morrisania section of the Bronx, which at the time was extremely vibrant, bursting with good schools, cultural centers and Latin and jazz clubs.

During those days, before his music captured the swinging feet and souls of America at large, Byrd was a music teacher at Alexander Burger Junior High School (near St. Mary’s Park). This vocation was during a now forgotten time, when NYC middle schools and high schools boasted about their bands and orchestras and music programs that allowed thousands of students to take their instruments home for practice.

As a Bronx music teacher, Byrd mentored numerous young musicians, including the trumpeter Jimmy Owens, who took private lessons, and the Latin trombonist Willie Colon, who was his student at Alexander Burger JHS.

It was Byrd who introduced Hancock to the percussionist Mongo Santamaría, and in the early 1960s, when he needed a pianist, he called Hancock. Santamaría’s band was then performing at Club Cubano Inter-Americano on Prospect Avenue, a popular Latin music spot.

During the gig, Byrd suggested that Hancock play his new piece called “Watermelon Man.” Santamaría loved it so much he asked Hancock if he could record it, and it became a smash hit.

Byrd’s legacy in the Bronx, and the renaming of the street in his honor, demonstrates how important music is to young people growing up and how it plays a significant role in their creative development.

Byrd's influence also demonstrates the importance of bridging cultures and joining the historic roots of Puerto Rican and Black music together.

Members of the original group, the Blackbyrds, will also be present. The pianist, composer and recipient of the first Bob Cranshaw Award, Onaje Allan Gumbs, will perform.

A celebration reception will follow (12:30 p.m.-2 p.m.) at the percussionist, composer, arranger and activist Bobby Sanabria's Bronx Heritage Music Center (1303 Nine Louis Blvd. in the Bronx).

This event and ceremony is free and open to the public. For more information, visit www.donaldbyrdculturalfoundation.org.

The Harlem native Lana Turner has appeared in a host of printed media outlets, as well as television and radio interviews. In Harlem, and perhaps certain parts of the world, she is an icon.

Currently, the celebrated woman of fashion and cultural radiance is featured at the Wallach Art Gallery at Columbia University's Lenfest Center for the Arts. The exhibit is entitled "Lana and Wendell: Sartorial Escapades," on view now through Sept. 9.

In this exhibition, photographers Dario Calmese (Turner) and Felicia Megan Gordon (avant-garde fashion designer Wendell Headley) capture the sartorial escapades of their respective muses and uptown self-expression creative style.