

## On The Hill

By Chester A. Higgins, Sr.



WASHINGTON, D.C. — Bill Harris is dead. Bill Harris lives. Jazz guitarist Bill Harris was always good to jazz; jazz was not always very good to Bill Harris. So in his last years, sick and unable to perform, he was debt-ridden. Friends had to hold benefits to raise funds to keep his house from being sold in auction. But if dreams by Rep. John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI) and aide, Dennis Kendrick, are realized, a museum for jazz performing arts will become enshrined as part of our national treasure. Then Bill Harris and scores and scores of other jazz legends will live once more. But more about this later.

I caught Bill Harris' last public performance. He was on the Capital City Jazz Festival billing with the Kenny Burrell Jazz Guitar Band and the Hank Crawford/Jimmy McGriff Quartet appearing on stage at Howard University's Cramton Auditorium.

For music lovers, that entire program was a vivid reminder of what a constructive and moving communication experience jazz can truly be. Bill Harris was thin, slow moving, rivened with the cancer that would end his life a few weeks hence. Yet his performance was gut wrenching, an example of how a true professional transcends handicaps and pain.

But Black music has always been like that—overcoming handicaps, growing mellow from pain and oppression, persuading a stubbornly unpersuadable America that the music they were hearing wrenched from the very souls of Black folks is the real goods — as classic as anything that sprang from the pens of Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, Mussorgesky, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, Prokofiev.

But their American names are: Ellington, Davis, Gilles-

pie, Parker, Strayhorn, Basie, Hampton, Big Jay McShan, Billy Holiday, Henderson, Waller, Berry, Armstrong, Monk, Taylor, Domingo, Isaac Hayes, Smokey Robinson, Marsalis and such a lengthy list that if the names were laid end to end, they would stretch far beyond the limits of even present-day American tolerance, understanding and growing but seeming grudging acceptance.

Black Americans all are they: brilliant artists whose works were sung by the pre-eminent poets Eckstine, Vaughan, Fitzgerald, Washington, Calloway, Rawls, Holiday, Armstrong, Davis, Ennis, Joe Williams, Brown (Ruth and James), King (Ben E. and B.B.), Pickett, Berry, Little Richard, Jackson (Bullnose and Michael), Nancy Wilson, Whitney Houston. Let me catch my breath.

But you get the point. Their names are legion, because they are many, far too many to list here. They date back before Mississippi John Hurt and Leadbelly to all the early blacks toiling in the mercilessly hot cotton fields of an oppressive and unre-

mitting American system of slavery. Their "holler" songs, crude, raw wrenched from souls writhing in pain. Refined they called on a far-away God in spirituals about a Joshua who fit the battle of Jericho, Swing Low, Sweet Chariot (longing to escape), metamorphosing to Blues (despair) to happy spirituals (gospel) and finally to happy, rollicking Saturday night good times (jazz).

These are the stuff of W.B. Dubois' famous books, *Souls of Black Folks*. Indeed, they are truly America's soul acknowledged almost everywhere in the world but here. It used to be that one could not walk into a southern record store and find a jazz or Black record on the shelves. They were called "race music" and hidden like bootleg likker under the counter. White American artists shamelessly ripped off Black artists' compositions as their own. It was not until recent "cross-over" music trend that Black music began to be broadly appreciated and compensated. It must be noted, also, that good Black Christian families frowned on jazz and Blues playing.

Indeed, it was really the British Beatles who helped kick open the door for more widely accepted Black music. John Lennon told me in an early interview that he threw away his artist paints and brushes, quit school to the outraged chagrin of his doting grandmother and bought a guitar after hearing Chuck Berry's version of Johnny B. Goode. Motown's genius was also a factor in changing America's ugly climate toward Black music and musicians. Everywhere in the world there are now jazz groups or societies. Some of them highly political.

And now lawmaker Conyers (D-MI) who is also a jazz lover, is trying to persuade America to establish a permanent museum/archival/national center for performing jazz artists here in the nation's capital.

Conyers and his assistant, Hendricks, went at their work with precision. Conyers has persuaded both houses of Congress that American jazz music is a national treasure. Both Houses overwhelming agreed, and resolutions have been passed to that effect. While they were at it, they also approved Conyer's suggestion that tap dancing — the kind performed with such consummate skill by Bill Bojangles Robinson, the Sand Man, Honey Coles and Gregory Hines — is also a national treasure. It is, Kendrick

## THE NAACP AND YOU!



Rev. Jesse D. Scott  
President  
Las Vegas, NAACP



### NAACP Holds Jubilee Days

The reason for Jubilee Days is just to remind every Black and every white person how cruel and inhuman slavery was. "Those who forget history are subject to repeat it." Accordingly, the NAACP will stage two events to celebrate the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln setting the slaves free on January 1, 1863.

First there will be a community rally held at Doolittle Center, Lake Mead and "J" Street, on Saturday, January 7, 1989 from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. A contest will be held from among Jr. and Sr. High School students ages 13 to 18. The questions will have concerns about Blacks in American History during the following periods: Slavery, Reconstruction, Sharecropping and the NAACP. The first place con-

testant will receive an all-expense paid trip to Disneyland for two. The second prize will be a 13" color television set and the third prize will be \$100 cash.

Resource materials for the contest can be found at the Westside Library and the NAACP.

Please Note that the library will be closed from December 19, 1988 through January 2, 1989.

The second Jubilee Day will be held on Sunday, January 8, 1989 at 3:00 p.m. in the Moyer Student Union Center on the UNLV campus. Dr. Paul Meacham, the President of Clark County Community College, will be the principal speaker. Music will be furnished by the Federation of Choirs and the Meister Singers.

TO: NAACP Executive Committee, Members & Friends  
From: Jesse D. Scott, Branch President  
Subject: NAACP SEMINAR/WORKSHOP

Your NAACP membership, goodwill and continued financial support are sufficient evidences that you want to assist the Las Vegas Branch of the NAACP in making a greater impact on the social, political and economic power of Southern Nevada.

For all the above reasons as well as others, we are extending an invitation to you to attend a NAACP educational seminar on Thursday and Friday, January 19 and 20, 1989 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and on Saturday, January 21, 1989 at 11:00 a.m. in the branch office, located at 940 W. Owens Avenue.

At your earliest convenience, please call the office at 646-1662 and let me know if you will be in attendance. We need to know how many to prepare for in both seating arrangements and refreshments.

If I am not in the office, please leave your name and the times you will attend with the secretary.

Thank you for your cooperation in this all important goal that desperately needs to be obtained. Understanding and more knowledge brings about smoother operations and closer involvement within our organization.

This education Seminar will be conducted by Mr. Jim Martin, NAACP's West Coast Regional Director from San Francisco.

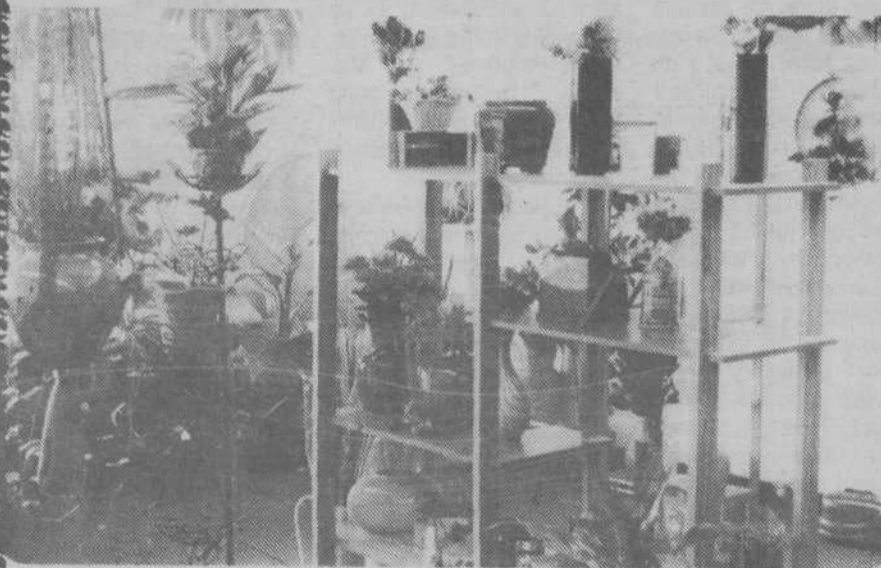
Mr. Martin has been asked to explain to the attendees how the NAACP functions on National, Conference, Regional and Local levels.

**YOUR PRESENCE AND PARTICIPATION COULD BE THE DIFFERENCE—REMEMBER, INFORMATION IS POWER!**

hopes and like, Conyers also believes, a short step from recognition of these art forms as national treasures to persuading congress to ante up funds to enshrine them in the Smithsonian Institution, the world's largest museum.

How natural and why hasn't someone thought of this before? Perhaps needed were the proper times and the right man to meet. In Conyers and the present climate, they finally converge.

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