

Tribute to "Miss Rhythm" Ruth Brown

By Parker Philpot
Sentinel-Voice

A local tribute to R&B singer Ruth Brown, who died last month, is being held Sunday, Dec. 17, at 2:00 p.m. at the First Church of Religious Science located at 1420 E. Harmon just east of Maryland Parkway.

Local entertainers have called to take part in the tribute, which is open to the public, with commemorative performances, and many fans and friends are expected to attend. Among them are Marlena Shaw, Freddie Eckstine, Bill Fayne, Sonny Turner and others.

"She was one of the most fun people I've ever met... always jolly... I enjoyed her company," said Jillean Williams, co-organizer of the tribute and wife of the late singer Joe Williams.

"It's more a celebration" than a memorial service, said event coordinator Ed Foster, who has photographed Brown for years and worked with her on the annual Joe Williams scholarship events Brown supported through performing.

"It's really a 'Celebration of the Life of Ruth Brown,'" Williams and Foster said.

Brown had a career in music, theatre and television that spanned six decades. She was most known for her rich, gutsy, story-telling style of vocally delivering R&B, blues and jazz. Her early R&B successes were the hits that "built" Atlantic Records — "(Mama) He Treats Your Daughter Mean" among them.

Although she later returned to performing regularly, Brown, 78, died from

complications following a debilitating stroke and heart attack she suffered in recent years. Her memorial and burial took place in Portsmouth, Va., her birthplace, according to family members. Brown had been a permanent resident of Las Vegas for many decades.

"People who knew her never had a chance to say good-bye," Foster said. "Jillean and I wanted to do something for the fans and others who knew her and loved her."

Brown co-founded the Rhythm & Blues Foundation to honor and help other entertainers who were in need of assistance, especially those who had been financially victimized by unscrupulous industry dealings. Her 1996 tell-all autobiography, "Miss Rhythm," drew the ire

of some in power, resulting in a loss of bookings and other threats to her career.

"She had gone through some terrible, terrible times and always rebounded," Foster said, adding that she had a remarkable "spirit" to always carry on.

"Considering the rather strenuous life she had, she was a miracle," Williams said.

There is no donation required, "because it is not a fundraiser," Foster said about the tribute event, but added that those wishing to make an individual memorial contribution might consider Brown's legacy organization, the Rhythm & Blues Foundation, and he said Brown avidly supported animal rights groups. For other information, contact Foster at (702) 242-0603.

From Ohio to here, Young respected

Special to Sentinel-Voice

After a hard, 2 1/2-year fight with cancer, local humanitarian Jerry Young passed on Monday.

Young earned respect—along with many friends—for his work with the Urban Chamber of Commerce, where he dutifully served as a board member.

Born in Cleveland, Young graduated from the Ohio State University and worked in various capacities—IBM marketing representative, manager for the office of data process for the city of Cleveland, deputy director for the Ohio Lottery Commission—before moving to Nevada in 1986 for International Game Technology, the world's foremost supplier of gaming technology and gaming machines. Working his way from staffer, Young, in June 2004, ascended to corporate vice president of business development.

Young is survived by Margaret, his wife of 27 years, and their four children: Jennifer, Jessica, Judy and Jerome. His funeral is slated for Dec. 13, in Cleveland, Ohio. Viewing will be from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m., with the service to start at 11 a.m. A local memorial service is scheduled for 11 a.m., Dec. 19, at Palm Mortuary on Main Street. Flowers can be sent to the funeral home or donations made to the Nevada Cancer Institute.

Brutality

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Dec. 2006, the police misconduct complaints Kamau said he has received from around the country have increased by 40 percent, from 239 to 336.

Two currently high-profile cases have sparked outrage from the streets to the halls of Congress.

The Nov. 21 shooting death of a 92-year-old woman in her Atlanta home by police who claimed to have been on a drug raid is now under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In addition, the Nov. 25 shooting death of 23-year-old Sean Bell by five New York undercover police detectives and officers. Bell was killed in a hail of 50 bullets as he and two friends left his bachelor party on his wedding day. Civil rights activists Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson Sr. and Marc Morial have called for FBI investigations into the case.

Kamau said federal legislation is needed to supercede some state and local laws. Strong police unions also present a problem, he said.

"People don't know this, but police unions, particularly in New York, for example, have been lobbying so that officers who are accused of misconduct don't have to talk to their own police administrators," Kamau said.

U.S. Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.), the incoming chair of the House Judiciary Committee, which oversees matters of criminal justice, said he will use his clout to demand more police accountability.

Conyers said he has already spoken with New York

Congressmen Gregory Meeks and Charles Rangel and is planning a meeting with activists and civil rights leaders to seek long-term solutions.

"We're looking at some new ways and we want to hold creative hearings," Conyers told the NNPA News Service in his first press interview since the Democrats won control of the House Nov. 7.

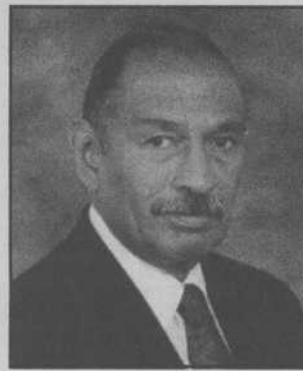
"I'm going to be meeting with Meeks, Rangel, Rev. Jackson and Rev. Sharpton and we're going to be looking at how we can move some of this racial and ethnic profiling into a more workable system."

Conyers, the senior member of the Congressional Black Caucus, said he will be able to say more after the official swearing in to his new position, which will take place in January.

"The whole idea is that we're beginning to see that it's just not working. Law enforcement investigating law enforcement is just something that may need to be changed," he said. "There's one thing that we had said earlier. That's getting independent systems to deal with this, and I think that might be possible... [We will] get a fair examination of how we improve from some of the deplorable situations that are now being taken for granted and keep reoccurring."

Kamau has seen a change in the way people are brutalized. Years ago, police mainly used guns, batons, dogs and tear gas. Now they have Tasers, stun guns and chemicals, such as pepper spray.

"Each of those items in



"We're looking at some new ways and we want to hold creative hearings."

— Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.)

many situations are being used for punishment and abuse and not control," Kamau said. "Also, you're now looking at where officers were carrying revolvers 30 years ago, they're now carrying semi-automatic weapons. There's also been an explosion in SWAT teams and intervention teams across the country."

Though police brutality has long been an issue in the Black community, public outrage over it has been stronger now that many incidents are being caught by citizens on videotape. Still, national advocates against police brutality say it will be difficult to crack police culture, including the so-called "blue code of silence" that causes some police to stick together and sometimes remain silent even after witnessing wrongdoing.

"The culture of law enforcement is White, male-dominated, racist, sexist, homophobic, and then you might find a good cop," said retired East Orange, N.J. Police Sergeant De Lacy Davis, founder and president of Black Cops Against Police Brutality.

"The mindset is that it is a White supremacy mindset, by and large, that we are

through a plate glass window.

The video was publicly released and the officers involved were charged with assault and falsifying police reports. But they got off when the jury deadlocked, splitting along racial lines. They were never convicted. The FBI and Justice Department also cleared the officers of any wrongdoing. However, the California State Legislature increased the penalty for falsifying a police report from a misdemeanor to a felony and now requires all police officers to take a class in racial sensitivity.

Davis, the author of the book, "Black Cops Against Police Brutality: A Crisis Action Plan," said he not only witnessed a lot of police brutality before he retired last year after 20 years, but he also broke the "blue code" many times to serve as a witness in court.

He said one problem is that legislative bodies fail to put teeth into new laws to control police behavior.

"When people talk about oversight and commissions and civilian review boards, all of that is reduced to nothing if there's no funding for it or investigators for it or if it doesn't have subpoena power," he said.

Among his advice in the book, Davis says if a person believes they are being stopped for no good reason, they should not debate the issue on the street.

"Take a deep breath and develop your strategy, which will be used later when you file your complaint. Remain calm," the book states. It says to take notes of the officer's name, badge, car number and physical description, and no-

tice any witnesses, the time of day, location, weather conditions and unique circumstances such as a type of vehicle or building nearby.

Davis, as a former union head, said the union must protect dues-paying members, but should also be held accountable. "Therefore, when the union is doing its job and even doing more than its job by protecting bad officers, then they should have to share in the liability and the culpability. They should be sued," he said.

Conyers, a member of the Judiciary Committee since his election in 1965, said police brutality and profiling will be among many criminal justice laws that the Judiciary Committee will now consider with its new Democratic power holders.

"And we're going to change very dramatically the circumstances that exist in this country in terms of civil rights laws and actions," Conyers said. "Now that we're in the majority, we don't have to come with hat-in-hand anymore. We can cause the investigation to happen. We can introduce legislation. And we have the majority that can pass the laws."

Meanwhile, Kamau is not optimistic about cops under suspicion in the Atlanta and New York cases.

"Don't anticipate any of these officers to be found guilty of anything," he said. "The bad news is that these kinds of shootings are easily covered up. All these officers have to do is speak to what their state of mind was and they're going to be exonerated. And their state of mind was, 'I was scared.'"