

NEA ARTS

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NEA JAZZ MASTERS

CELEBRATING 35 YEARS





1

Reverberations
The Ongoing Musical Legacy of Betty Carter
BY MICHAEL GALLANT



4

The Unencumbered
Herbie Hancock
Musician, Educator, Humanitarian
BY ANN MEIER BAKER



7

Being True to Herself
Toshiko Akiyoshi Brings Japanese Culture to Jazz
BY KATJA VON SCHUTTENBACH



10

If You Build It...
The Recording Legacy of Rudy Van Gelder
BY DON BALL



14

Milt and Dizzy
A Photographic Glimpse of Dizzy Gillespie, Courtesy of Milt Hinton
BY REBECCA SUTTON

This issue

Since the NEA Jazz Masters program first began 35 years ago, 145 awards have been made to jazz artists and advocates who have made a significant contribution to the music. Though these awards celebrate the accomplishments of individuals, the impact and legacy of our honorees spread far beyond a single life. Through their talent and vision, they have changed the sound, shape, and reach of jazz, and pushed this uniquely American art form beyond the possibilities of imagination. In this way, not only do the NEA Jazz Masters represent the epitome of musical skill, but they allow all of us to celebrate the spirit of innovation, and better appreciate the many ways jazz impacts our lives.

Because the work of NEA Jazz Masters touches so many people in so many ways, their legacies are fittingly varied. In this issue of *NEA Arts*, we highlight six Jazz Masters who have made particularly remarkable impacts. They have changed the sound of jazz recording from a studio in their parents' living room, and mentored future generations of rising jazz musicians. They have developed new strains of jazz, and have shown that jazz is big enough to embrace all manner of cultural traditions. They have used jazz as a diplomatic and educational tool, and have extended the reach of jazz to other art forms.

To learn more about the lives and legacies of any of our NEA Jazz Masters, please visit us online at arts.gov/honors/jazz.

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NEA Jazz Master Betty Carter performing at the Pori Jazz Festival in Finland in 1978. PHOTO BY KOTIVALO, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

REVERBERATIONS

The Ongoing Musical legacy of Betty Carter

BY MICHAEL GALLANT

Listen to 1992 NEA Jazz Master Betty Carter effortlessly twist a melody into an alternate dimension, alchemizing it into a raw, effortlessly virtuosic, and beautifully improvisational mutation of its originally composed form, and you will understand that hers was a voice and creative brilliance for the ages. As singer Carmen McRae, also an NEA Jazz Master, once described, “There’s really only one jazz singer—only one: Betty Carter.”

Talk to any of the scores of ascendant jazz artists sparked forward by Carter’s decades of musical mentorship, though, and you’ll realize that her once-in-a-generation gift for voice and interpretation isn’t her only contribution to echo into the future.

Carter was born in 1929 and laid to rest 69 years later, leaving behind a roster of mentored musicians that is every bit as impressive as the body of work the singer recorded. That list of musical heavyweights includes Stephen Scott, Geri Allen, Don Braden, Mulgrew Miller, Cyrus Chestnut, Benny Green, Kenny Washington, and 2017 NEA Jazz Master Dave Holland—and that’s just the beginning.

Perhaps two of Carter’s most visibly accomplished mentees are bassist Christian McBride and pianist Jason Moran. McBride is a five-time Grammy Award winner who serves in leadership roles for organizations like the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and Newport Jazz Festival and educates students through the organization Jazz House Kids. Moran is a MacArthur Fellow who has been described by *Rolling Stone* as “the most provocative thinker in current jazz.” He currently leads the Betty Carter’s Jazz Ahead program in his role as artistic director for jazz at the Kennedy Center.

It was in fact through Jazz Ahead, a career development residency program founded by Carter in 1993 in Brooklyn

and brought to the Kennedy Center in 1998, that Moran first directly felt Carter’s influence. As a student, he was selected to participate in the Kennedy Center’s inaugural Jazz Ahead class. Along with a small group of fellow young musicians, he experienced what could well be described as an ongoing master class in musical risk-taking.

“During the two weeks we worked together, she gave me a lot of confidence in the kind of approach I had,” said Moran. “This was around 1998, and my approach was still under construction. I might say I was a bit of an outsider. I proposed to perform a song with three singers, two saxophonists, two basses, piano, and drums.”

Moran’s concept was indeed unusual, and his piece unlike any other on the program. “Some of the other students were whispering that when Betty would hear my song, she was going to tear me apart,” he said. “But when Betty did hear the song, she turned to everyone—at least in my mind she did!—and said, ‘See, this is what you all should be trying to do!’ She had berated many students for bringing in songs that sounded too traditional. She then helped my song out, and it was eventually performed at the final concert. She was proud and supportive, and I never forgot that.”

According to McBride, Carter’s passion for giving opportunities to younger musicians such as himself and Moran and supporting their explorations was a two-way street, and one that paid all parties back in creative dividends. Carter herself once stated that she “learned a lot from these young players, because they’re raw and they come up with things that I would never think about doing.”

“She herself always stayed fresh by having young musicians around her,” said McBride. “It was 50-50, and that comes from a long line of mentorship in music, particularly in jazz, but in classical music as well. It’s not like a rock band where you get four musicians, try to make some hit records, and never break up.... In jazz, we have to make sure that all of these great musicians out there get an opportunity to get heard and better themselves, express themselves, and develop their skills. Betty is part of a long line of mentors in the history of jazz.”

McBride first became aware of Carter during his pre-teen years, when he was initially discovering the music that would shape his career and artistic journey. It was hard to miss the iconic singer, he said, when being taught about the legends who shaped the legacy of jazz.

▼► Betty Carter leading students in the Jazz Ahead program at the Kennedy Center.

PHOTOS BY JEFFREY KLIMAN, COURTESY OF THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS



As a first-year student at the Juilliard School of Music in New York City, McBride received an invitation to join Carter's trio, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that thrilled him—but was unexpectedly lost due to an unfortunate miscommunication about who was supposed to call whom once Carter returned from a European tour. In 2017, McBride laughed about the crossed wires that cost him the seat in the band. Though Carter ended up hiring another bass player at the time, she and McBride went on to play together on many occasions, becoming close friends up to the time of the singer's death.

Having supported her on the bandstand so many times, McBride described Carter's approach as a truly original variation on the jazz vocal theme. "Most jazz vocal albums are highly polished, highly stylized, with nice, tight arrangements," he said. "Now, Betty always had nice, tight arrangements and great musical directors, but the way that Betty sang was so unorthodox with her sense of rhythm and timing. Even her sense of intonation was so unusual that you were drawn in by its unusual-ness. I don't think we'll ever see another singer like Betty ever again."

Throughout the years, McBride saw Carter's impact on younger musicians like himself firsthand. "Betty would police us," he said with a laugh. "There was a certain generation of jazz musician who would come and listen to the younger musicians play and give them a report card after almost every set. When Betty came into the club—Bradley's, the Village Vanguard, Sweet Basil, wherever it was—everybody onstage sat up a little straighter, played a little harder, and paid a little more attention. Betty commanded that respect. I miss her dearly."

To Moran, Carter's attention to the rising generations of jazz musicians was a mixed matter



of present and future, personal and global. "Betty seemed to be ultimately concerned about the health of jazz and the musicians that create it," he said. "I think she fought insanely hard for her place in the canon, and knew that another way to ensure this was to influence the new crop of musicians. She left a lot of seeds with us, and we continue to place them carefully into the soil."

Case in point, Moran continues to channel Carter's guts, brilliance, and spirit in his work running Betty Carter's Jazz Ahead. "I only hire faculty members that worked with Betty," said Moran. "This ensures that we all know the vibe Betty had during *Jazz Ahead*, and we keep up the intensity."

"In our past four years, the students continue to shock us, and what we now understand is that we are making an enormous family," he continued. "These students really know each other after two weeks of working together. We become a family and we never forget these bonds. It's very emotional because I hope this is what Betty intended, as it is extremely powerful work." 🌀

Michael Gallant is a composer, musician, and writer living in New York City. He is the founder and CEO of Gallant Music.



THE UNENCUMBERED HERBIE HANCOCK

MUSICIAN, EDUCATOR, HUMANITARIAN

BY ANN MEIER BAKER

▲ NEA Jazz Master Herbie Hancock at Kenny Dorham's *Una Mas* sessions, March 1963. PHOTO BY FRANCIS WOLFF © MOSAIC IMAGES LLC

Herbie Hancock's music-making has never been confined by genre, and his influence on what music sounds like today is immeasurable. Especially remarkable are his unflagging efforts to nurture the growth, development, and evolution of jazz. In the years since the pianist, composer, and bandleader became an NEA Jazz Master in 2004, he has continued to be a pioneer in an extraordinary array of music, collaborations, and cultural and humanitarian initiatives.

Hancock is a multidimensional force for good. As a musician, his remarkable career spans five decades and includes 14 Grammy awards and an

Oscar. As a teacher, he leads by example through his own insatiable quest for knowledge. As a humanitarian, he is devoted to bringing people together and working to make the world a better place.

Composer and pianist Vijay Iyer said Hancock has been a real inspiration to him through the example he's set, "not only as a player, but as a person with a kind of fearless nobility." Iyer became a fan the moment he heard the revolutionary song "Rockit" in the early '80s. Later, he got to know Hancock when they shared festival stages, and then when Iyer

became a professor at Harvard University, where Hancock presented six Norton lectures at the school's Mahindra Humanities Center entitled "The Ethics of Jazz." "To put those two words together—ethics and jazz—makes you think less about aesthetics or the music business, and more about matters of the heart. And [Hancock] has very genuine interests in all of these things."

In his 2014 lecture, Hancock told about a time when he felt like he was in an artistic rut. During a gig with Miles Davis, Davis sensed Hancock's musical frustration and leaned over and whispered in his distinctive, raspy voice, "Herbie, don't play the butter notes." At first unsure of what he meant, Hancock decided that "butter notes" must mean the predictable notes. So for the rest of the night he started experimenting by leaving the third and seventh notes of chords out, which he said suddenly opened up space for all the other notes available to him.

This notion of "opening up space" for new opportunities is a theme that runs throughout Hancock's life and is influenced by his faith. A Buddhist, Hancock often speaks of the concepts of openness and infinite potential. He believes that you can grow while also helping others, and that you can reach up while also reaching out to lend a hand.

For 15 years, Hancock has been chairman of the board of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. "Herbie is a very hands-on board chair," said Monk Institute President Tom Carter, "and he contributes between 30 and 60 days each year to the institute's work all around the world." Hancock has been instrumental in the organization's wide-ranging programs. For example, he is a judge and mentor for its annual International Jazz Competition for talented young musicians, which provides scholarships to cover tuition for college-level jazz education studies and funds for private instruction. Many competition winners have gone on to become leaders in the field, including Cécile McLorin Salvant, Joey DeFrancesco, Jane Monheit, and Chris Potter. Trumpeter and composer Terence Blanchard, artistic director of the Thelonious Monk Institute, described Hancock's teaching style as "teaching by example through his life."

In 2011, Hancock became an honorary UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. In an effort to promote peace through dialogue, culture, and the arts, UNESCO officially designated April 30 as International Jazz Day, the events of which are implemented by the Monk Institute to highlight jazz and its diplomatic role of uniting people throughout the world.

Hancock is also behind the Monk Institute's new initiative called Math, Science & Music, which uses music to increase students' skills in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and help students think creatively. The project—which is supported in part by an NEA grant—will develop a wealth of free, engaging curricula, games, apps, and other online elements. For example, Fractions and Rhythm is a curriculum for elementary students, Proportional Reasoning and DJ Mixing is for middle schoolers, Algebra and Jazz will engage high school students, and The Mathematics of Music is a college curriculum that uses math to explore questions such as: What is harmony? What does it mean to tune an instrument? What is it that gives a musical instrument its characteristic sound?

Math and science have always been an important part of Hancock's life. He started college as an engineering major at Grinnell



◀ Herbie Hancock at the NEA's National Council on the Arts meeting in March 2004 to receive his NEA Jazz Master award. PHOTO BY KATHY PLOWITZ-WORDEN

College in Iowa, and has always loved to learn about how things work, taking things apart and putting them back together again. An early adopter of technology and music, he is known to many as “the gadget guy.” Blanchard shared this warning from first-hand experience: “Never get behind him in the airport security line, because while he empties his pockets of a dozen devices, he’ll definitely hold things up.”

When Blanchard first started working with Hancock he was nervous. “Because he’s Herbie Hancock!” he explained. “But then you figure out that Herbie’s looking for you to contribute, because he’s always trying to expand his experience as an artist. When you’re on tour with Herbie, doing a sound check isn’t a cursory thing—it’s like doing another whole concert, because Herbie is always trying out new ideas. If they don’t work, he moves on; and, if they do work, he moves on, because he is always trying to learn.”

Pianist Justin Kauflin became aware of Herbie Hancock as a high school student when he was just discovering jazz. “When I heard his recording

Directions in Music: Celebrating Miles Davis and John Coltrane it absolutely blew my mind. And getting to know the human being Herbie Hancock has been just as inspiring as the musician. He’s got so much humility—he’s humble to the music.”

Iyer credits Hancock with influencing every aspect of the details of music—rhythm, melody, harmony, the aesthetics of groove, how a band plays together, and the role of technology in music. “When the discourse emerged in the ‘80s about what’s real jazz and what is not, Herbie never got involved in any of that. He was unencumbered by what some saw as a divide, because he knew the larger truth about how to communicate as a music maker. So much of what is possible today is because of Herbie Hancock.” 🎧

Ann Meier Baker is the director of Music and Opera at the National Endowment for the Arts, where she oversees the NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship Program.

▼ Hancock as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador.
PHOTO BY FLICKR USER UNITED NATIONS PHOTO



NEA Jazz Master Toshiko Akiyoshi leading an open rehearsal for the general public at Garfield High School in Seattle as part of the NEA Jazz Masters Live program in 2009. PHOTO BY BRUCE C MOORE, COURTESY OF EARSHOT JAZZ

BEING TRUE TO HERSELF

Toshiko Akiyoshi
Brings Japanese
Culture to Jazz

BY KATJA VON SCHUTTENBACH

One of the premier bandleaders and pianists of the second half of the 20th century, 2007 NEA Jazz Master Toshiko Akiyoshi doesn't look the part. In the hard-driving, male-dominated jazz field at the time, a petite Japanese woman who wrote and arranged her own music was unusual to say the least. But Akiyoshi was a pioneer in bringing an Asian sensibility to the music and follows in Mary Lou Williams' footsteps as a major female jazz composer and arranger.

Akiyoshi had come a long way. Born in 1929 to Japanese parents in Manchuria, then part of the Japanese Empire, she grew up speaking Chinese, Japanese, and English and began studying classical piano at age seven. However, World War II turned her family's life upside down. When the war ended, Japan had been defeated and Manchuria was first occupied by Russian troops and then returned to China. Sixteen-year-old Akiyoshi and her family survived but were forced to move penniless to mainland Japan. "When we went back to Japan that was already broken, my father had to try

to find a place for us to live," said Akiyoshi in a 2008 interview conducted by Anthony Brown for the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, funded by the NEA. "Meanwhile I took a job in a dance hall. My father got really mad because the normal situation in Japan in those days, the girls never worked." First hearing jazz through a Teddy Wilson record and recordings of Bud

Powell on the radio, Akiyoshi moved to Tokyo in 1948 to pursue playing jazz. She mostly played for U.S. service members still in the country and later with visiting American jazz artists such as Illinois Jacquet, Oscar Pettiford, and J.J. Johnson.

Oscar Peterson, after seeing Akiyoshi perform, brought her to the attention of his

friend Norman Granz, who had come to Japan with his Jazz at the Philharmonic show. He encouraged Granz to record the pianist with Peterson's trio—bassist Ray Brown and guitarist Herb Ellis, with J.C. Heard added on the drums—which resulted in the album *Amazing Toshiko Akiyoshi*. The recording opened doors for her and she was ready to take the next leap as a self-supporting young woman in a culture that was not open to middle-class girls working for a living. She also wanted to grow musically. "I'd become sort of like the biggest frog in a very small pond, so to speak," said Akiyoshi in the Smithsonian interview. "As you know, jazz is a social art: if you are surrounded by better players, you become better at it."

In 1956, she went to the Berklee School of Music in Boston, receiving a full scholarship as her Granz recording had impressed Lee Berk, the school's founder. At age 27, Akiyoshi started over for the second time in her life, this time completely on her own and in a foreign culture. She immersed herself in studies, as well as working four nights a week with her own band at the Storyville jazz club in Boston. In 1959, after graduating from Berklee, she moved on to New York rather than return to Japan as she had intended to do. She immersed herself in the jazz scene, playing at legendary clubs including Birdland, the Village Gate, and the Five Spot. In the 1960s, working with legendary bandleader and bassist Charles Mingus inspired Akiyoshi to develop her talents as a composer and arranger for large ensembles.

Although it took time, she was able to put together a band after she and her second husband, saxophonist and flutist Lew Tabackin, had relocated to Los Angeles. Her first big band album, *Kogun*, brought her back to her Japanese culture. The title track "Kogun" is influenced by a story about a Japanese soldier discovered in a Philippine jungle who did not know that World War II had ended, 29 years after the fact. The revolutionary step was using Japanese recordings of traditional *tsuzumi* drums on the track (there were not *tsuzumi* players in LA at the time), which Akiyoshi then sequenced with the jazz orchestra. "The normal belief in Japan was to be Japanese and play jazz was a handicap," Akiyoshi noted. "I look at my heritage as my asset rather than my handicap. Maybe I can bring something into the jazz tradition.

"I thought Japan was going to put me down, because Japanese jazz fans want more of a



▲ Akiyoshi accepting congratulations from fellow NEA Jazz Master Gerald Wilson for her NEA Jazz Masters award.
PHOTO BY TOM PICH

purist approach,” she continued. “I thought, ‘Go ahead and put me down, I don’t care.’ That album became an all-time seller [in Japan].” The album’s success proved a turning point in her career. Akiyoshi continued to combine Japanese elements, whether it be culture, history, or traditional instruments, with a strong jazz base on subsequent big band recordings like *Long Yellow Road*, *Tales of a Courtesan*, and especially *Hiroshima: Rising from the Abyss*. Of the more than 100 songs she has written, she said, “Probably the most important music compositions all have Japanese culture weaved in.” Her fan base is enthusiastic about her work and made her the first woman ever to place first in the Best Arranger and Composer categories in the *DownBeat* magazine Readers’ Poll.

For *Hiroshima*, which was commissioned by a priest from Hiroshima, Akiyoshi was faced with the horror of World War II again. “I never had an air raid experience or anything like that, and then we came back to Japan, the whole family in 1946. I started playing immediately in the dance hall. At that time, there wasn’t much talk about this bomb dropped by the Americans,” she said in the Smithsonian interview. “So when the priest gave me photos [of victims three days after the bombs were dropped], I was shocked, because I had never seen anything like this. I wasn’t quite sure if I could write something like this.” One of the images the priest sent, however, was of a little girl who survived the bombings smiling to the camera. The image inspired Akiyoshi to find an approach to the tragic material. “I’m going to make this more like a piece of anti-war, anti-nuclear weapon,” she noted. “We will not give up hope that someday maybe people will tolerate each other.” A month after the first performance of the finished song cycle, 9/11 occurred in the United States, and the section of the composition called “Hope” became a regular part of her set.

Throughout her career there have been suggestions that there are better male performers or that her work isn’t “authentic” jazz, but Akiyoshi has persevered and prevailed. “I hoped people would identify with the music,” she said. “But the main thing to me always has been to be very, very true to me. I’m the first listener, as far as the writing’s concerned. If I’m not true to my music, I’m not worthy.” She added, “Some music *stands*, and I think time is the judge of the music, of the composition.”



In 2015, at age 86, she and her husband performed at the royal palace for Japanese Empress Michiko, an accomplished pianist herself. A year later, Japanese public television NHK presented a 90-minute documentary about her and Tabackin (which included a live performance of Akiyoshi’s resurrected orchestra at Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City). “Given this honor in my native country is extremely gratifying,” she noted in a recent e-mail exchange with the NEA. 🌟

Katja von Schuttenbach is the jazz specialist at the National Endowment for the Arts.

▲ Akiyoshi leading the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra in performance of her compositions. PHOTO BY DANIEL SHEEHAN, COURTESY OF EARSHOT JAZZ



NEA Jazz Master Rudy Van Gelder with his recording equipment in the 1960s.
PHOTO BY FRANCIS WOLFF © MOSAIC IMAGES LLC

IF YOU BUILD IT...

THE RECORDING LEGACY OF RUDY VAN GELDER

BY DON BALL

Studies have shown that more young people are living at home with their parents than at any time since 1940. But how many of them are asking their parents to build a recording studio? In their living room!? Yet that is what 2009 NEA Jazz Master Rudy Van Gelder did, with hardly any professional recording experience under his belt, and a steady career as an optometrist. Maybe more surprising, his parents agreed and turned their living room into one of the most important jazz recording studios of the 1950s.

The name Rudy Van Gelder might not ring a bell. But if you have even a modest jazz record collection, most likely something you would pull out that was recorded in the 1950s and early 1960s was recorded by Van Gelder. His mark on jazz was that prominent. Throughout his career, Van Gelder worked with some of the major producers on the biggest jazz labels: Alfred Lion at Blue Note, Bob Weinstock at Prestige, Bob Thiele at Impulse!, and Creed Taylor at CTI, to name just a few.

Although not a musician, he has shaped the sound of jazz, and more importantly, how we listen to jazz. The music is primarily improvisational and usually best experienced live to capture the in-the-moment revelations of the musical conversations being held by the jazz artists. Van Gelder realized the need to “be in the room” with the musicians while they were creating, and that is what he attempted to duplicate in his recordings. “It was a U-shaped house,” Van Gelder recollected about his first studio in Hackensack, New Jersey, in a 2009 NEA interview with Molly Murphy, “and there was a large center section. The kitchen would go off on one leg and the bedrooms would go off on the other leg and the studio was right in between. The kitchen was a hallway away from where I used to put Kenny Clarke. It was a wonderful scene, but I think that’s one of the reasons the music sounded that way, because it was really not a studio in the sense that studios were then.”

Van Gelder is probably best known for his Blue Note recordings in the 1950s and ‘60s, where he helped shape the sound of the record label. His time at Blue Note started, as Van Gelder told it, with a recording he made of Gil Mellé for a small independent record company. Alfred Lion, one of the founders of Blue Note Records, wanted to put that recording on his label. After he published the recording, he wanted to make another with Mellé that had the same sound. He took the album to one of his engineers, who basically told Lion that he couldn’t duplicate that sound and that

he should go back to the original engineer. So Lion went back to Van Gelder, and that was the beginning of a more than ten-year relationship with the label that resulted in hundreds of recordings, many considered jazz classics. What they all had in common was that singular sound: each instrument was crisp and distinct, and the tonal range of the recordings gave it a warmth and live in-the-room feel.

Van Gelder was always very secretive about how he achieved that sound, but Michael Cuscuna, president of Mosaic Records and formerly with Blue Note—where he worked with Van Gelder on close to 200 remasters of Blue Note recordings—shared one technique that Van Gelder used in recording. “Once Alfred Lion found him, they developed a strong rapport, and Rudy’s sonic identity began to take shape. He was using tape, and he would load the tape right up to the threshold in terms of the amount of input, right up to the needle going into red, without it going into red. He was very brave that way. Most engineers in the ‘50s, you’ll hear more hiss on theirs because they’re very timid about the levels they record at. With Rudy, you’ve got almost like a vivid, digital kind of sound with an analog tape. I think what he did was to really capture the power and the spirit and the clarity of jazz.”

Another technique was close micing of the instruments, so that recording them at the high level he did created a striking, powerful sound for each instrument, and made them stand out on the recording. “He somehow recorded the drums where every detail of the drum kit was really vivid and really audible,” Cuscuna added. “It’s like you were sitting next to the drummer, whereas a lot of engineers in those days were afraid of the physical loudness of the drum set. That’s something I think Rudy really pioneered, micing the drum set to get all the detail and all the nuance of it.”

In 1959, Van Gelder gave up his job as an optometrist and began recording full-time, building a new studio for himself in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, where he moved with his wife. He wanted to get a real, warm room sound with his new studio—and a larger space to accommodate larger ensembles—and worked with a Frank Lloyd Wright apprentice to design it. The studio had a high cathedral-like ceiling with cedar beams and specially made blocks for the walls that reflected the sound the way Van Gelder wanted. Surprisingly enough, the first session he recorded there was not a jazz great but the West Point Glee Club.

The studio became his main place of work for the next 50-plus years. 2017 NEA Jazz Master Ira Gitler, who also attended many of Van Gelder's sessions in Englewood Cliffs to gather material for his liner notes (and who worked as a producer on a few recordings with him) wrote in his liner notes to Booker Ervin's album *The Space Book* that the studio was "a nonsectarian, non-organized religion temple of music in which the sound and the spirit can seemingly soar unimpeded." One can only imagine that John Coltrane would have agreed with that sentiment as he recorded his spiritual masterpiece *A Love Supreme* in the studio.

Even in a live setting, Van Gelder managed to create a luxurious, impeccable recording. "He recorded *A Night at the Village Vanguard* with me," said jazz legend and 1983 NEA Jazz Master Sonny Rollins, who recorded more than 15 albums with Van Gelder on various labels. "That was the first jazz album recorded from the Village Vanguard, and Rudy was the engineer. I was concerned with trying to not make any mistakes myself. Just get the music right. Because it was

accepted by me, and probably everybody else, that it was going to be recorded superbly by Mr. Van Gelder."

In 1999, Van Gelder was contacted by Cuscuna to begin remastering his initial analog Blue Note recordings for digital formats. At first Cuscuna thought that he would refuse, as he rarely looked back at work he had already completed. But Van Gelder looked at it as a chance to improve upon what he had already done. "He was looking at it as taking the past and dragging it into the future. And he did. He had a great time doing it. He would call me about this Hank Mobley record or that Blue Mitchell record like he was just discovering it for the first time. And, I think, as a fan he was hearing it for the first time." Like Rollins in performance concentrating on not making a mistake, Van Gelder would be doing the same while recording, so he didn't necessarily listen aesthetically to the fabulous music he was recording at the time.

His methods of recording continued to develop over time, incorporating multitrack mixing, sound booths, and digital recording.

► **Sonny Rollins**
performing his
landmark 1957 show at
the Village Vanguard,
recorded by Rudy Van
Gelder.

PHOTO BY FRANCIS
WOLFF © MOSAIC
IMAGES LLC

▼ **Rudy Van Gelder**
accepting his NEA Jazz
Masters award.

PHOTO BY TOM PICH



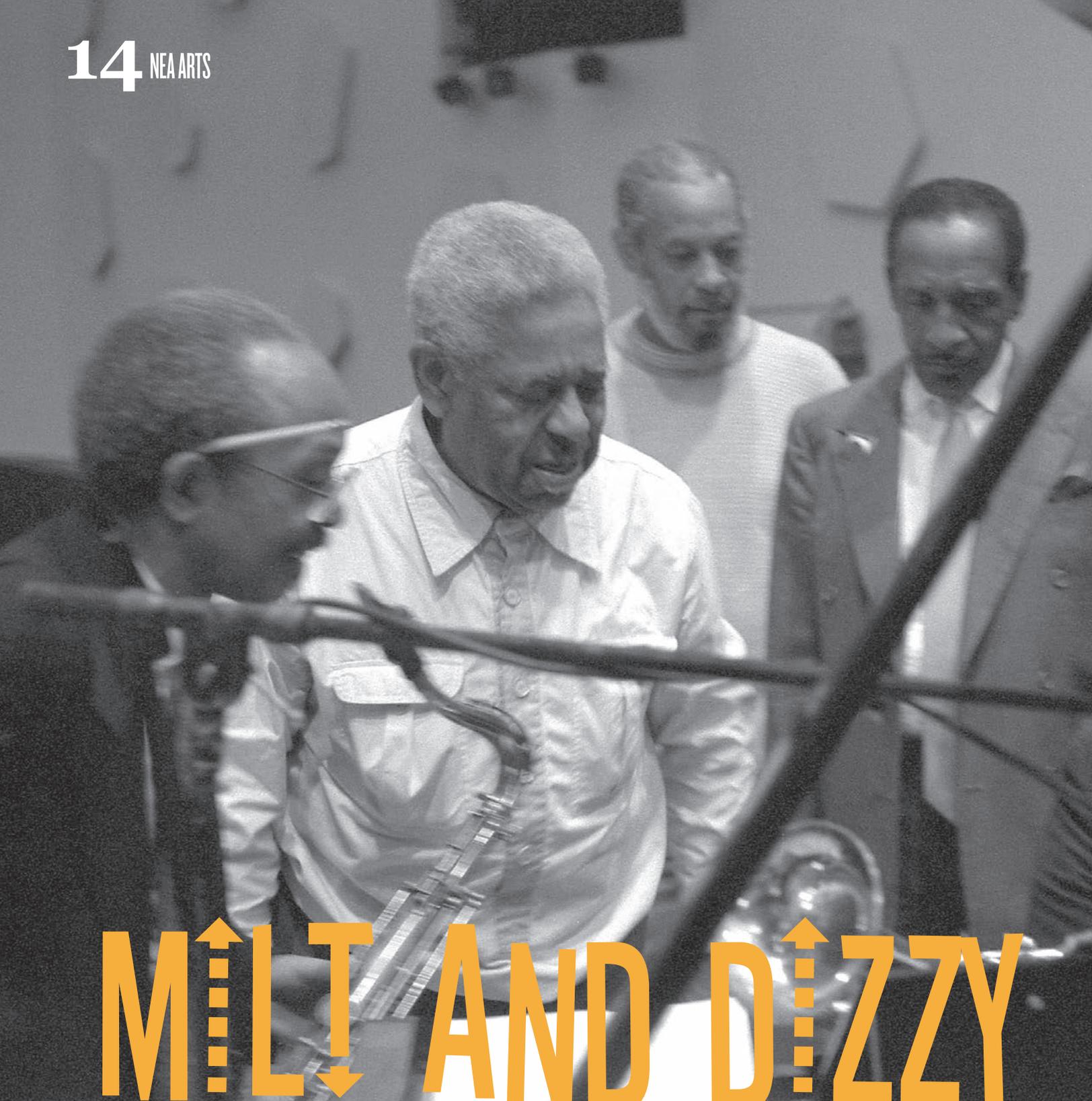
Van Gelder was always looking to find a new way of capturing musical performances. “It was an evolutionary process,” said Cuscuna. “But there was always an essence and a vividness and a sense of power to what he recorded that never left. It never changed. Those were always the core values of his sound. And he defined the way we listen to jazz records, the way jazz records should sound.”

“I have to thank Rudy Van Gelder,” added Rollins, “for that part of any success that I’ve had. I just went there trying to get the music right. And Rudy was there to make it sound as good as it ended up sounding. He was one of these great individuals that I’ve been blessed in my life to have met and worked with.” 🎷



A PARTIAL LIST OF CLASSIC RUDY VAN GELDER RECORDINGS OF NEA JAZZ MASTERS

- Miles Davis: *Bag's Groove* (Prestige, 1954)
- Modern Jazz Quartet: *Django* (Prestige, 1954)
- Jackie McLean: *4, 5 and 6* (Prestige, 1956)
- Sonny Rollins: *A Night at the Village Vanguard* (Blue Note, 1957)
- Mose Allison: *Back Country Suite* (Prestige, 1957)
- Jimmy Smith: *The Sermon* (Blue Note, 1958)
- Donald Byrd: *Fuego* (Blue Note, 1959)
- Gil Evans: *Out of the Cool* (Impulse!, 1960)
- Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers: *Buhaina's Delight* (Blue Note, 1961)
- Dexter Gordon: *Go* (Blue Note, 1962)
- Chico Hamilton: *Passin' Thru* (Impulse!, 1962)
- Lee Morgan: *The Sidewinder* (Blue Note, 1963)
- Andrew Hill: *Point of Departure* (Blue Note, 1964)
- Wayne Shorter: *Night Dreamer* (Blue Note, 1964)
- Horace Silver: *Song for My Father* (Blue Note, 1964)
- Archie Shepp: *Fire Music* (Impulse!, 1965)
- Herbie Hancock: *Maiden Voyage* (Blue Note, 1965)
- Bobby Hutcherson: *Dialogue* (Blue Note, 1965)
- Lou Donaldson: *Alligator Bogaloo* (Blue Note, 1967)
- Freddie Hubbard: *Red Clay* (CTI, 1970)
- McCoy Tyner: *Extensions* (Blue Note, 1970)
- Kenny Burrell: *God Bless the Child* (CTI, 1971)
- Kenny Barron: *The Moment* (Reservoir, 1991)
- Joe Henderson: *Lush Life* (Verve, 1991)
- Ron Carter: *The Bass and I* (Blue Note, 1997)



MILT AND DIZZY

**A Photographic Glimpse of Dizzy Gillespie,
Courtesy of Milt Hinton**

BY REBECCA SUTTON



When 1993 NEA Jazz Master Milt Hinton received a camera for his 25th birthday, he could not know that it would one day become nearly as important to him as his bass. He began taking pictures of his fellow musicians in Cab Calloway's band—people like Chu Berry and Cozy Cole. "These were my friends, and I wanted pictures

sounds, as he began to incorporate different ethnic elements into his music.

Gillespie and Hinton remained friends throughout their lives, and Hinton cited the trumpeter as a major influence on his own music. The two often toured and performed together, and Hinton's photographs of Gillespie range

of them so that one day we could look back and remember the great times we'd shared," Hinton wrote in his 2008 book *Playing the Changes*, which was co-written with David G. Berger and Holly Maxson.

One friend he documented time and again was Dizzy Gillespie, considered one of the world's greatest jazz trumpeters and a 1982 NEA Jazz Master. "When I took those early pictures of Dizzy," Hinton wrote, "we were both in Cab's band. Even back in those days, I knew he was very innovative, but I never suspected he would turn out to be such a giant."

Indeed, Gillespie—whose centennial we celebrate this year—went on to become one of the founding fathers of bebop, along with his collaborator Charlie Parker, creating and performing the innovative music and writing many songs that became part of the jazz canon. He was also one of the first jazz musicians to tour extensively with the U.S. Department of State, beginning a new chapter of jazz as both diplomatic act and cultural bridge. Not only did these travels introduce jazz to new audiences worldwide, but they fed Gillespie's constant thirst for new

◀ From l-r: Jimmy Heath, Dizzy Gillespie, unknown, Milt Jackson, and Hank Jones, at a recording studio in New York City.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MILT HINTON, © MILTON J. HINTON PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, WWW.MILTHINTON.COM

from the 1940s to the 1990s, from New York City to Nice, France.

Just as Hinton caught much of Gillespie's legendary career on camera, so too did he capture the lives and careers of countless other jazz greats, accumulating more than 60,000 photographs of musicians over the years. Even as he left his mark on the sound of jazz—performing with big bands and playing for television programs like the *Dick Cavett Show*—Hinton also left behind an incredible visual record of an aural art form. In fact, he used his NEA Jazz Master award (and an earlier fellowship he received from the NEA) to help finance the archiving of his extensive photo collection.

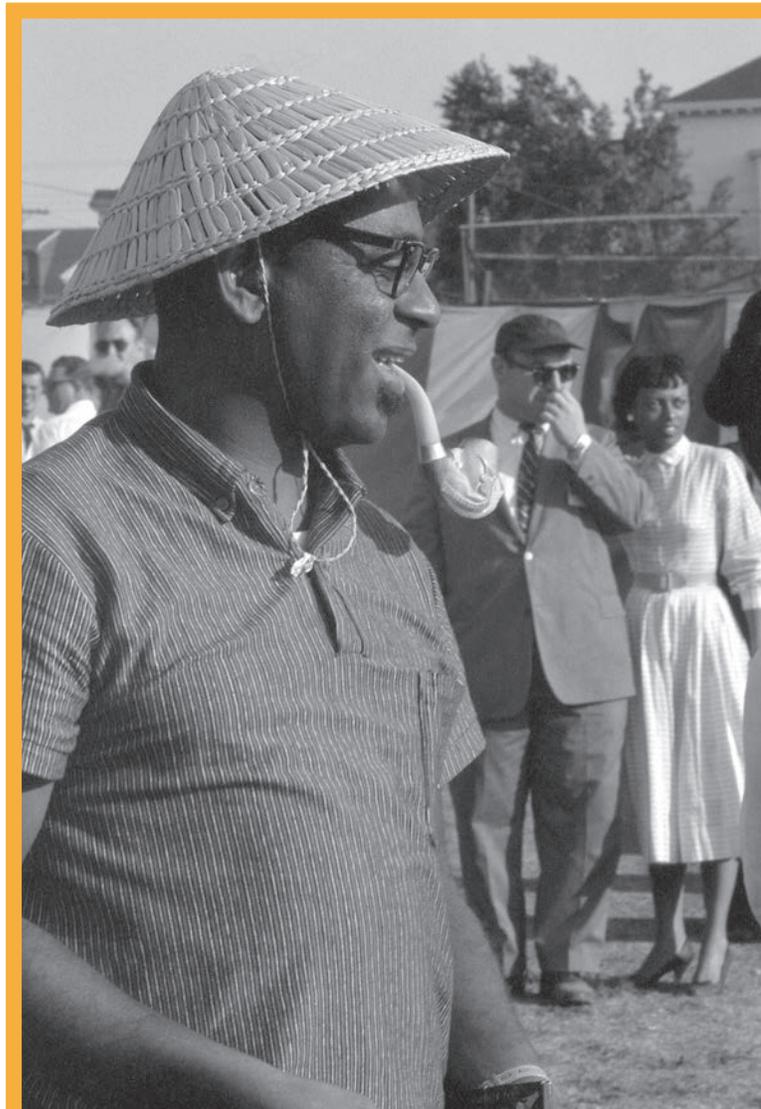
“[A]s time went on, I realized the importance of the world I was living in, and I decided to try

and make a record of it for future generations,” wrote Hinton. “Being a musician gave me access, and consequently some of the best photos I ever took were simply a matter of being in the right place at the right time. Of course, I had no idea that some of my shots would be used to document jazz history, but I'm glad I've lived to see it.” 🎧

In 2017, the Milton J. Hinton Photographic Collection and Oberlin College developed a new traveling exhibition of Hinton's photographs and memorabilia. Oberlin maintains several initiatives to preserve Hinton's legacy, including the Milt Hinton Bass Institute and the preservation of the Milton J. and Mona C. Hinton Papers.

▼ Danny Barker and Dizzy Gillespie on a train while touring with Cab Calloway, c. 1940. PHOTOGRAPH BY MILT HINTON, © MILTON J. HINTON PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, WWW.MILTHINTON.COM





▲ From l-r: Dizzy Gillespie, Oliver Jackson, J.J. Johnson, Derek Smith, and Benny Carter at a recording studio in New York City, c. 1984.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MILT HINTON, © MILTON J. HINTON PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, WWW.MILTHINTON.COM

◀ Dizzy Gillespie at the 1957 Newport Jazz Festival, with Master George Wein and his wife Joyce in background.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MILT HINTON, © MILTON J. HINTON PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, WWW.MILTHINTON.COM

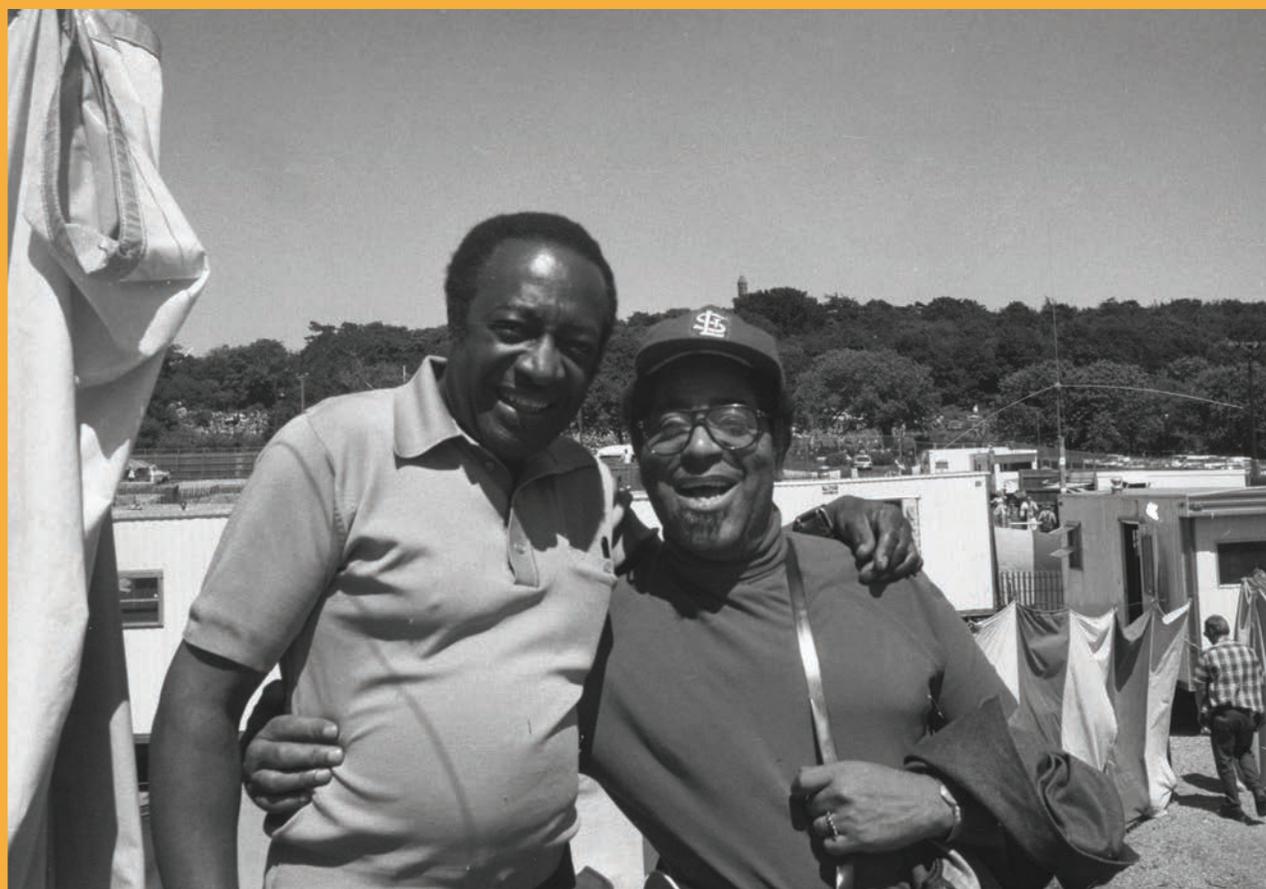


▲ From l-r: Clark Terry, Dizzy Gillespie, and Urbie Green at Duke Ellington's 70th birthday at the White House, Washington, DC, 1969.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MILT HINTON, © MILTON J. HINTON PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, WWW.MILTHINTON.COM

► Milt Hinton and Dizzy Gillespie at the 1971 Newport Jazz Festival.

PHOTO © MILTON J. HINTON PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, WWW.MILTHINTON.COM



NEA ARTS

NUMBER 1, 2017



**NEA NATIONAL
HERITAGE
FELLOWSHIPS**
CELEBRATING 35 YEARS



1

For the Love of It
*A Celebration of the
Work and Legacy of
Philip Simmons*
BY PAULETTE BEETE



5

Preserving the
Language, Preserving
the Culture
*The Vision and Impact of
Esther Martinez*
BY REBECCA SUTTON



9

Continuing the
Tradition
*Artemio Posadas and
the Sones Mexicanos
Movement*
BY VICTORIA HUTTER



12

Deep Listening
The Art of Liz Carroll
BY CLIFFORD MURPHY



15

The Weaver in My
Poems
*A Remembrance of
Em Bun*
BY MONICA SOK

This issue

Since the NEA National Heritage Fellowships were first awarded 35 years ago, we have honored 413 masters of the folk and traditional arts. Though these awards celebrate the accomplishments of individuals, the impact and legacy of the honorees spread far beyond a single life. The artwork they create is woven through with the DNA of their communities, so that every piece of art conveys the stories, the history, and the values of a people. In this way, not only do our Heritage Fellows bind their communities closer together, but they allow all of us to celebrate and appreciate the diverse voices and cultures that constitute American art.

Because the work of Heritage Fellows touches so many people in so many ways, their legacies are fittingly varied. In this issue of *NEA Arts*, we highlight five Fellows who have had particularly remarkable impacts. They have knit together the Cambodian refugee community through textiles, and helped save the Tewa language from extinction. They have shaped and preserved Charleston's architectural character, and linked generations of Mexican-Americans through the sound of *son huasteco*. And they have deeply embedded Irish fiddling into the lexicon of American music.

To learn more about the lives and legacies of any of our NEA National Heritage Fellows, please visit us online at arts.gov/honors/heritage.

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NEA National Heritage
Fellow Philip Simmons.
PHOTO BY TOM PICH

FOR THE LOVE OF IT

A CELEBRATION OF THE WORK AND LEGACY OF PHILIP SIMMONS

BY PAULETTE BEETE



for a man who never sought fame but became one of the most famous—and revered—men in South Carolina nonetheless.

Simmons' story starts in 1912, when he was born on Daniel Island, a small community off the coast of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. Raised first by his grandparents, as a young boy Simmons was sent to live with his mother in Charleston where he could get a better education. By 13, he was apprenticed to Peter Simmons (no relation) who ran a blacksmith shop on Calhoun Street, a shop that Philip Simmons eventually took over, working there for nearly eight decades.

According to a 2008 interview with Philip Simmons, he had a choice of trades close to where he lived in Charleston, including shoemaking and tinsmithing. He chose blacksmithing, however, because as he described, "I love action, and a lot of action was going on in the blacksmith shop." As Carlton Simmons, Simmons' nephew and one of his apprentices, put it, "He liked the excitement of being in the fire."

When Philip Simmons first started learning his trade, the work was practical: shoeing horses or making and repairing tools and wagons. With the advent of motorized vehicles, many predicted that the blacksmith's trade would die out. Peter Simmons, however, had other ideas. As Phillip Simmons noted, "The old fellow told me, 'There's always going to be something for the blacksmith to do.'"

The direction of Philip Simmons' work changed thanks to a simple request circa 1938. He was asked to build a decorative gate for a walkway. Despite his initial reluctance since he had no training in decorative work, Simmons accepted the commission. According to local lore, the client convinced him by assuring Simmons that making curves for a gate would be the same as curving a horseshoe.

Simmons' mastery of the tight C-scrolls and S-scrolls that characterized Charleston's ironwork garnered him a reputation as a top-notch artist that only grew with time. In addition to mastering the traditional style of decorative work that had proliferated in Charleston during its colonial era, Simmons also developed his own style, inspired by nature and including elements such as the palmetto tree—South Carolina's state tree—and other motifs from the natural world. People began to look to Simmons not just for repairs but to forge new pieces made in the colonial style.

Can one man be responsible for a city's character? If you're 1982 NEA National Heritage Fellow Philip Simmons, that answer is yes. If you've been to Charleston, or even just seen pictures of the South Carolina city, chances are you've seen Simmons' work. Thanks to "the poet of ironwork," as he's been called, the light and lacy iron ornamentation that has been part of the city's architectural vernacular since colonial times is still one of its most recognizable features. Not a bad legacy

▲ A detail of the Egret Gate at Riley Waterfront Park in Charleston, South Carolina, created by Philip Simmons. PHOTO BY STEVE LEPRE

Blacksmith Walter Hill, director of the Horry County Museum, first met Simmons when Hill was 13. While he didn't serve a traditional apprenticeship with Simmons, Hill, whose father was also a blacksmith, got to know Simmons at regular meetings of what was then called the South Carolina Blacksmiths Association (and is now named in honor of Philip Simmons). Hill recalled how even when Hill was a young teen, Simmons would often punctuate his talks at the gatherings with, "Isn't that right, Walter?" which gave Hill the confidence that he could master decorative ironwork just as Simmons did. Hill later went on to collaborate on several projects with Simmons, including a set of gates now installed at the South Carolina governor's mansion and an installation at the Philip Simmons Park on Daniel Island.

Though he never set out to be a preservationist, one of Simmons' most visible legacies is the fact that the Charleston of today looks architecturally very similar to the Charleston of two centuries ago. "Let's consider that if the city of Charleston hadn't had Philip Simmons there, an old-school man who knew how to do the ironwork, and this stuff started rusting away, they probably would have torn it down and not replaced it. Or replaced

it with something modern, something different," said Hill. "But because Philip Simmons was there, they had a resource to say, 'Can you fix this? Can you repair this? Can you keep this 200-year-old piece of colonial ironwork on the side of my house?... And because he was the one keeping it up, it just became natural to say, 'Well, I don't have an old piece of iron in my house but I want one that looks like that, so can you make one?'"

According to Hill, Simmons had to teach himself how to fabricate the old designs. "When Philip Simmons got into doing the ornamental stuff, he didn't have old guys around who'd made that stuff who taught him how to do it. He was able to learn from those before him by studying the tracks they left behind, studying the techniques they used and then applying them himself."

For Hill, this self-taught aspect of Simmons' work was an important life lesson. "[I learned it's about] opening your eyes and not just waiting on somebody else to show you how. You're going to have to research it, you're going to have to find it out. You're going to have to experiment with it and expose yourself to what others have done before and try to figure out their way."

▼ Simmons made this city gate for his hometown of Charleston.
PHOTO BY STEVE LEPRE





▲ The new NEA National Heritage Fellows medal, created by Carlton Simmons, who apprenticed with his uncle Philip from age 13.
PHOTO BY CHERYL SCHIELE

Hill acknowledged that Simmons' character also had a big impact on him, particularly his humility in the face of the many fans and the many honors he earned through his work. Hill also appreciated Simmons for his willingness to share his knowledge rather than hoarding it as a trade secret. "The first time I ever met Philip Simmons, [I knew] this was *the* Philip Simmons. His work was in museums. This is a name you'd heard your whole life. There are books written about him. And he just immediately embraced me. 'Do you want to learn this? Is this what you want to do? Well, come here and let me show you. I've got time for you,'" remembered Hill.

Carlton Simmons agreed that what made his uncle special was not just the unmatched quality of his work but also his personality. "He was the most humble, gracious fellow and he was one of those fellows who would do things in the community but you would never know he did it. He wasn't a person to boast about what he'd done," he remembered. "[He] would try and get as many kids involved in the blacksmith trade as he could."

He also acknowledged that not only did his uncle inspire him to pursue ironwork, but that the resurgence in the trade in Charleston is a direct legacy of his uncle. "You got a lot of people could do ironwork in Charleston. They are all over Charleston now. Just from the mere fact that Philip Simmons was so popular by doing that. You'd see him on TV."

An important lesson he took from his uncle was to always do the work from a place of love. "Philip Simmons did [ironwork] for the love. He wasn't in it for the profit... [I]f you're doing it for the profit, it'll fall right back down."

In 2016, Carlton Simmons designed a new NEA National Heritage Fellowships medal in honor of his uncle. One look at the medallion's intricate curves is proof that his uncle's high artistic standards and dedication to craft lives on in a new generation. As Carlton Simmons said, "I really feel proud when family sees my work, and they say, 'You've gotten like the old man, you sure can do it.' That's what makes me feel good." ▲

NEA National Heritage
Fellow Esther Martinez.
PHOTO COURTESY OF
ESTHER MARTINEZ



PRESERVING THE LANGUAGE, PRESERVING THE CULTURE

THE VISION AND IMPACT OF ESTHER MARTINEZ

BY REBECCA SUTTON

When 2006 NEA National Heritage Fellow Esther Martinez attended school in the 1920s, she was punished for speaking her native Tewa language. This was typical for Native-American children who were forced to attend government boarding schools—along with cutting children’s

hair, giving them Christian names, and enforcing Western dress and etiquette, it was part of the government’s larger goal of breaking the generational link necessary to sustain any culture or tradition. In the words of Captain Richard H. Pratt, who opened the Carlisle Indian School

in Pennsylvania in 1879, Native education was meant to, “Kill the Indian, save the man.”

But Martinez never forgot her native tongue. She retained it through her boarding school years, through raising ten children, and through her years as a janitor and cook. When she was approached by linguist Randall Speirs in the mid-1960s, she had carefully preserved the language, stories, and traditions of New Mexico’s San Juan Pueblo people.

Working with Speirs, Martinez helped create a Tewa dictionary and translated the New Testament into Tewa. She began teaching Tewa classes at San Juan Pueblo schools, and passed on Tewa stories to her own people as well as to English speakers at events such as the International Storytelling Festival. She has been

credited with almost single-handedly saving the Tewa language, a feat which garnered her the Heritage Fellowship.

But this was just the start of her linguistic legacy. After she was killed in a car crash at age 93 on her way home from the NEA National Heritage Awards Ceremony, Congress passed the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act in 2006. The Act offers three-year grants for language immersion schools and early childcare centers, as well as community language programs.

Today, the Esther Martinez grants are a critical part of funding for Native immersion schools across the nation, including the White Clay Immersion School, which is housed within the Aaniiih Nakoda College on the Fort Belknap



Indian Reservation in Harlem, Montana. The school was founded in 2003 by Lynette Chandler after she promised her dying grandmother that she would work to save the Aaniiih language. At that time, Aaniiih was only spoken by a handful of elders, all but one of whom have since passed away. Today, Chandler estimates there are close to four dozen students and adults who are fluent or nearly fluent in the language.

“It’s a heavy weight on a small person’s shoulders,” said Chandler of White Clay students, who learn not only Aaniiih but cultural traditions such as how to work with medicinal plants, how to sew ribbon skirts, and how to handle horses. “But we have a responsibility to our people and to our ancestors—who had it much harder than we do—to keep our ways alive, to practice our

ways, to speak our language, and to carry on and learn the teachings that have come through with time. It’s our job to learn these things, and it’s our job to pass them on.”

Roughly 170 Native languages are still spoken in the United States today—about half the number that existed when the country was first colonized. Of those still spoken, all but 20 or so are considered critically endangered, and could be extinct by 2050 according to some experts. However, the past decade has shown promise: as recognition of the devastating effects of language loss has grown, so too has counteractive funding at the federal and local levels, including the Esther Martinez grants. To date, 52 Esther Martinez grants have been awarded for a total of \$12.9 million.

This funding has helped expand a movement to ensure “native languages are not just part of some sort of history lesson,” said Lillian Sparks Robinson, the former commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans (ANA), which is the agency that administers the Esther Martinez grants. “That is a goal for every Native community—to be able to get back to a place where the children are learning the language in their home, they’re using it on a daily basis, in casual settings, in formal settings, socially, academically, professionally.” Robinson said the effects of getting back to such a place would be profound. “We’d see healthier families, and I think we’d see communities that are thriving socially, economically, physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally,” she said.

Chandler is already beginning to see the effects on her own community. Since the White Clay Immersion School was founded, she said tribal members have once again begun calling themselves the White Clay or Aaniiih—previously, they had referred to themselves as the Gros Ventre, which is the federally recognized term, and which Chandler noted, is French. Buildings at the college now all feature Aaniiih names, and the tribe has begun a language preservation program of its own. Even the varsity girls basketball team at a public school 25 miles away has started wearing ribbon skirts on game days after their manager—a seventh-grader from White Clay, which has a sports co-op with the public school—began wearing her own ribbon skirt to games. “That’s showing we’re instilling Native pride; we’re helping other people bring back our culture,” said Chandler.

LaRae Wiley, who founded the Salish School of Spokane in Spokane, Washington, has begun



◀ NEA National Heritage Fellow Esther Martinez with her family at the rehearsal for the NEA National Heritage Fellowship Concert in 2006, with emcee Nick Spitzer (right). PHOTO BY TOM PICH

to see changes in her community as well. When the immersion school was founded in 2010, there were only 20 or so Salish-speaking elders in the Spokane area. There are now 69 students currently enrolled, thanks in large part to two Esther Martinez grants, which supported the creation of an early childhood center and elementary school, as well as the development of 200 early reading books in Salish. Wiley said people increasingly greet one another on the street with the Salish word for “hello,” and community language classes—held three times a week—have proven popular not just with students’ parents, who are required by the Salish School to attend language classes, but with other community members as well.

But perhaps most profound is the effect on students themselves. “Our students are recognized as speakers and leaders,” said Chandler of White Clay children. “They’re really revered as special people within our community. They get called upon to give prayers at different things, ceremonies—even midnight mass in the Catholic Church. Everybody in the community tells me that they know which kids are from the Immersion School and which are not, because our students are very respectful, they’re quiet, they listen when they’re supposed to be listening. They just carry themselves in a certain way.”

This special quality is borne out in academic performance. A growing body of research has shown that Native-American students taught in their Native language demonstrate higher test

scores, graduate from high school at higher rates, and have increased rates of college matriculation. This could be critical to close the achievement gap between Native and non-Native students: according to the 2011 National Indian Education Study, Native-American children in eighth grade scored 28 points behind white students in math and 22 points behind in reading.

Wiley believes the connection between language and academic achievement is clear. “If you have a strong foundation for who you are, where you come from, you have pride in yourself, then you are just more resilient,” she said. “You can handle what life throws at you without turning to drugs or alcohol or things that can take you off track. What I think that language and culture creates is that wholeness, that resiliency. That’s going to empower our young people to finish high school, go to college, become professionals in the community, but also hang on to all those traditional things that we so desperately need.”

It’s a resiliency Esther Martinez herself possessed. In a *Los Angeles Times* obituary for Martinez, her grandson Matthew said of his grandmother, “No matter the harsh conditions, she still carried that desire to hold on to her language and culture and document it and pass it on. Growing up, I sort of took it for granted. We had our family, my grandmother, our dances, our ceremonies. That was a way of life. I realize not everybody has that connection. It’s a gift. It really is a gift.”

Thanks to the Esther Martinez Act, it’s a gift that Native children across the country now possess. “I don’t know if [Martinez] would have ever thought that her work would have affected so many tribes,” said Wiley, noting that there were now five Native language immersion schools in her area of Washington alone. “I don’t know that she would have ever envisioned her work had this huge of an impact.”

▼ A drum circle at the Salish School of Spokane, Washington, where students learn not only their Native language but also their traditional culture. PHOTO BY LARAE WILEY





CONTINUING THE TRADITION

Artemio Posadas and the Sones Mexicanos Movement

BY VICTORIA HUTTER

“I don’t know why I was drawn to the *son huasteco*,” recalled 2016 NEA National Heritage Fellow Artemio Posadas in an interview with Daniel Sheehy in 2005. “I believe it was the falsetto that really got to me, along with the profundity of its poetry.” *Son huasteco*, also called *huapango*, was born in the Huastecan region of northeastern Mexico (where Posadas is from) in the late 19th century, and is performed by a trio consisting of violin, *jarana huasteca* (a small guitar), and the *quinta huapanguera* (a large guitar). Usually two of the three musicians will sing short, often improvised, lyrics that follow traditional poetic forms, alternating between them. Melodies are punctuated with high falsetto as the violin often tears off into wild ornamentations.

In a 2013 documentary directed by Roy Germino called *The Mexican Sound*, music producer Mary Farquharson describes the music style as having “a tremendous intensity. It’s the Mexican specialty of a very painful joy or a very joyful pain.” At *son huasteco* gatherings, people dance in a clearing or on a wooden platform, their footwork combining with the music to create a rhythmic conversation between dancers and musicians. In recent decades, it has also created a conversation between and across geography and age. The music is gaining popularity, especially among Mexican-Americans in areas of California, engaging young people and binding together generations. One of the driving forces behind its resurgence is Posadas.

▲ NEA National Heritage Fellow Artemio Posadas with his band performing at the 2016 NEA National Heritage Fellowship Concert. PHOTO BY TOM PICH

Posadas fell in love early on with his native music, studying it at university in San Luis Potosi and from the best practitioners he could find. He learned all three instruments, the traditional songs, and the dance styles. He brought this rich expertise with him when he came to the United States for the first time in 1973, visiting San Francisco. He came back in 1974 and led workshops in son huasteco and *son jarocho* (another son style from Veracruz, Mexico) to eager students in the Mexican-American community. It was the first time he had taught.

He said of the students who took his early classes, “For those who did not have Mexican heritage in their background, this was an opportunity to learn another cultural practice. But for those who had Mexican ancestry, this was simply a way to reconnect to their heritage, back to Mexico, which in 1973 was highly desired in Mexican-American, Chicano communities.” In 1979, Posadas made the Bay Area his home and later became a United States citizen.

▼ Posadas being interviewed at the 2016 Heritage concert.
PHOTO BY TOM PICH

One young person that Posadas worked with closely beginning in the mid-1970s was Russell Rodriguez. For about three years, they practiced together. Then in 1981, Rodriguez was awarded an apprenticeship grant through the NEA’s Folk Arts program to work with Posadas on son jarocho, developing his skills on the *requinto jarocho*, a guitar-type instrument. After the grant period ended, they continued to play together even after Rodriguez shifted to mariachi music. Rodriguez noted, “I still consider our apprenticeship vibrant, I continuously look to him for information, performances, and to share conversation.”

Posadas has mentored other apprentices, including Dolores “Lolis” Garcia who is now an experienced performer and cultural leader in her own right. His current apprentice is Jorge Beltrán. Together they are exploring the poetry of son huasteco, a side of the tradition less often studied than the music and dance. The Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA), an organization committed to supporting cultural



traditions through grants and other programs, has supported these mentorship opportunities with Posadas through their own apprenticeship program. And in turn, the NEA has funded ACTA's apprenticeship program each year since 2002.

In addition to modeling the technique, style, and feelings of Mexican son, Posadas has brought Mexican musicians to the U.S. so that his mentees could interact with them. He also took students with him to Mexico so they could see the music in its natural environment. Rodriguez said that by seeing how the music is celebrated in Mexico, Mexican-American students could understand how the music "provides different kinds of sentiment, because sentiment comes not only for those playing it but also those who are singing and dancing along. Artemio worked very hard to make sure we experienced those things."

Through these one-on-one musical relationships, whether formal apprenticeships or simply the consistent practice between mentor and mentee, not only is technique passed on but deep cultural knowledge as well. Posadas noted that "those who have participated in an apprenticeship program will be those who continue the tradition, who will be the cultural leaders who make sure that this practice stays vibrant and work to amplify it or to explore other aspects of it." As a perfect example, Rodriguez is now program manager for ACTA's apprenticeship program.

In 1990, Posadas began an ongoing relationship with East Bay Center for the Performing Arts in Richmond, California, teaching son huasteco, son jarocho, and other styles. The center has 600 students at its main site and about 4,500 in programs in 22 Title I public schools. In addition to teaching at the center, Posadas and his longtime mentee Lolis Garcia participate in professional development training for teachers, focusing on integrating Mexican son into academic subjects, creating units to promote ESL teaching and English and social studies.

Jordan Simmons, the artistic director of the center, said Posadas "has raised a generation of artists who are themselves teaching in the academy and in the community. He has influenced hundreds and hundreds of students." But Posadas is quick to credit others who have helped keep the tradition alive and vital. In addition to Lolis Garcia, Jorge Beltrán, and Rodriguez, Posadas cites Rosa Flores, Ricardo Mendoza, and Lourdes Beltrán.



Further increasing the music's popularity is the demand for it at social gatherings. Posadas noted, "Now that there are more people familiar with the music [in the U.S.], there are more gatherings, like in a fandango. People practice, engage the tradition, and in that space they are really enjoying themselves and learning through participation. It's not that they have to dance or sing. It's simply their presence there." He continued, "The music serves as a kind of tool or a conduit to connect to the heritage, to the roots, but it is also something that connects young people to the older generation, their parents and other family members who might have grown up in Mexico or still keep certain traditions. This is a key link in the chain to make it whole or complete."

Amy Kitchener, the executive director of ACTA, observed, "What I think is so interesting about this *sones Mexicanos* movement is that it's participatory and when you think about the arts nationally and what's been happening over the last decade, there is the move from observational kinds of engagement to more participatory engagement. This form so exemplifies this deep type of participatory art-making."

Posadas said, "The music even in its most traditional manner seems to be fresh because of the context in which we live, just the bombardment of so much commercial music from all sides, radio, TV, the Internet. Because it has its own nuanced freshness, it stands out on its own." 🌀

▲ Posadas, with NEA Chairman Jane Chu, receiving his Heritage medal.
PHOTO BY TOM PICH



DEEP LISTENING

THE ART OF LIZ CARROLL

BY CLIFFORD MURPHY

Although more than ten percent of the total population of the United States claim Irish ancestry, for centuries this heritage was seen as a source of embarrassment and shame. But with the election of John F. Kennedy, this sentiment shifted to one of pride. What followed was a renaissance of Irish culture within the United States—one that has showed no signs of slowing down. There were the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem in the 1960s, continuing with the Chieftains and the Bothy Band in the

1970s and the punk-fueled traditional songs of the Pogues in the 1980s. Starting in the 1990s, Michael Flatley (1988 NEA National Heritage Fellow) exploded onto the world stage with his *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* productions showcasing Irish dancing. Throughout that time period, though, there was one artist who has consistently pushed the culture forward through her music: 1994 NEA National Heritage Fellow Liz Carroll. Known for her prowess on the fiddle, Carroll is also renowned for her compositional

▲ NEA National
Heritage Fellow
Liz Carroll.
PHOTO BY TOM PICH

skills, having written about 200 original Irish tunes, many of which have now become part of the canon of Irish music.

Carroll's story begins not in Ireland, but in Chicago in 1956. Born and raised on the South Side by Irish immigrants, her father, Kevin, played the accordion, and her mother's father was a fiddler. Music was always in the house, and the family frequented the nearby Irish social clubs.

Encouraged to play accordion at age five, Liz got her first fiddle lessons at nine from Sister Francine, a parochial school nun. Playing music in the Carroll home had its perks: if she practiced the fiddle, she didn't have to wash the dishes.

"I got out of the dishes playing Irish music," joked Carroll.

Family forays to Irish music hangouts like Hanley's House of Happiness led to Carroll sitting with her fiddle on the outer circle of sessions, soaking in the tunes of Chicago's Irish music stalwarts like Johnny McGreevy and Eleanor Neary. Carroll herself had started to compose as a young child, a sign of the future impact she would have.

And yet, "I didn't conceive of Irish music going anywhere," said Carroll of her modest expectations. "The only thing I saw was the Chieftains [a traditional Irish band], or musicians in pubs."

But this changed when teenager Carroll traveled to Ireland to compete in the All-Ireland Junior Fiddle Competition. All the South Side

dances, *ceilidhs*, and all-night sessions paid off: she won second place. The following year, she claimed top honors in the category.

Renowned for a fierce, if friendly, competitiveness ("like the Geena Davis character in *A League of Their Own*," joked Billy McComiskey, an Irish button accordionist and 2016 NEA National Heritage Fellow), Carroll returned to Ireland in 1975 at age 18 determined to win—not the Junior title, but the All-Ireland Senior Fiddle Championship, a feat that at the time had only been accomplished by one American.

She won. And with accordionist Jimmy Keane, she also won the All-Ireland Senior Duet Championship.

"I remember the audience going out of their minds when she played," said McComiskey, who was also there in '75. "There's genius," he stated, "and Liz is it on the fiddle."

Despite that auspicious accomplishment, Carroll suspected that it was unlikely, though not impossible, that Irish music could deliver three square meals a day or support a family in the late '70s. So the All-Ireland champion took her fiddle to college, where she received a degree in social psychology from DePaul University (though Irish music always seemed to intrude at exam time). She stayed on at DePaul for a degree in elementary education, and taught at a Catholic school on the South Side for one year. "I definitely learned what I had skills in," she said of her short-lived teaching career, "and what I didn't."

Opportunity called in the form of folklorist and 1999 NEA National Heritage Fellow Mick Moloney, who "asked me to go on a six-week tour of Africa the next fall with the Green Fields of America, and I said 'Yeah!' So no more teaching."

From that point on, family and music—in that order—have been the two defining themes of Liz Carroll's life.

Today, Carroll is widely considered one of the foremost composers of new tunes that have worked their way into the traditional Irish repertoire. This is no easy feat for an art form that dates back hundreds of years. She was the first American to receive the Gradán Ceoil TG4 Cumadóir award—Ireland's highest traditional music award for composition—and in 2010, she and guitarist John Doyle were nominated for a Grammy in

◀ Carroll at the Ralph Rinzler Concert during the 2016 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, DC. PHOTO BY MICHAEL G. STEWART



the Best Traditional World Music category. That same year, she published *Collected: Original Irish Tunes*, a book of 185 compositions that she wrote, with stories of the songs' inspirations. The book proved so popular that it is in its second printing.

When she was younger, Carroll felt some inner tension over the question of "What is my style?" while also feeling that the player of the tune "should be unrecognizable, and the tune should stand on its own." Still, at a recent Swannanoa Gathering in North Carolina, Irish music luminary Martin Hayes turned to her and said, "Liz, you've created a style."

"You are who you are," she acknowledged about her personality emerging in her playing. "I genuinely listen to other people play, and am curious about other people while they play. Maybe they feel that. I listen for the humor in their music. I'll throw things back at people. If you have a good moment in a session, you'll have a conversation in the music. It's a joyful thing. Maybe I like that when people acknowledge what I've done, and I'll look for that, and do that [for others]. I've always just wanted to get more and more and more from tunes. So I'll look for variations. Sometimes that's nice for some people, and sometimes it's a distraction. But I love changing it up, and I really like people who can change the tunes on the fly in the moment."

Carroll's impact on her hometown has been as strong as it has been on Irish music: in 1999, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley proclaimed

September 19th "Liz Carroll Day," acknowledging the musician's contributions to the city's Irish community. She has also collaborated with other cultural institutions in the city. In 2001, under the auspices of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company, she accompanied Irish-American author Frank McCourt on staged readings from his works, and in 2015, she produced music for an Art Institute of Chicago exhibition, *Ireland: Crossroads of Art and Design, 1690-1840*.

Carroll continues to participate in pub sessions in Chicago and wherever the road takes her. A good session can give her a buzz when she meets very young musicians she can encourage. And "a bad session is when people are so busy listening to themselves that they are not listening to others." Carroll will sometimes stop a session to ask someone to play, and will sit back and listen. And other times, she will hear her own tunes played by musicians who have no idea she wrote the tune.

This quality of deep listening, said McComiskey, is the root of her genius. "She was always respectful of me," he remembered of his first musical encounters with Carroll. "And I would see her with Eugene O'Donnell and other giants of Irish music. She would have these beautiful bonds with people." 🍀

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▼ From l-r: Fellows Mick Maloney, Liz Carroll, and Billy McComiskey at the 2016 NEA National Heritage Fellowship Concert.
PHOTO BY TOM PICH





THE WEAVER IN MY POEMS

A REMEMBRANCE OF EM BUN

▲ NEA National
Heritage Fellow Em
Bun at her loom in the
basement of her house.
PHOTO COURTESY
OF EM BUN

BY MONICA SOK

In my poems, Em Bun weaves night and day, mourning the disappearance of her firstborn son. She weaves using her own hair—long, silver strands that grow out of grief. Seeking refuge in her loom, she works tirelessly.

The persona of Em Bun in my poetry is not so far from my real grandmother, my *lok yeay*. A traditional silk weaver, she didn't use her hair to weave; she used silk scraps donated by a local tie factory in York, Pennsylvania. As a child, I'd watch her in the basement as she pushed the rows of weft into the warp, passing the shuttle back and forth, and this back and forth now makes me think of her struggle as a refugee in America. I used to strum the tightened threads like guitar strings or play with cones of silk that she skillfully rolled from skeins. But I didn't know of the hours she spent preparing the silk, the hours she privately grieved her son, Samon, lost to the Khmer Rouge. I miss the sounds of her floor loom, her feet stepping on the treadle—these wonderful rhythms she created in her home. Little did I know of her depression or the isolation she felt when she resettled in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, her new home. I wonder what she would think of me now, writing poems about her in English, a language she did not speak.

► Em Bun with her NEA National Heritage Fellowship award. PHOTO COURTESY OF MONICA SOK



Last December, the National Endowment for the Arts announced the recipients of the 2017 Creative Writing Fellowships while I was visiting Cambodia. I was among those poets, both honored and shocked by this award.

As I walked around the riverside in Phnom Penh, I remembered the framed certificate with a large, silver "A" hanging in my grandmother's living room and in smaller print, the words: *Master Traditional Artist*. In 1990, she had won an NEA National Heritage Fellowship. In a photograph, she holds this certificate. She doesn't look directly at the camera, but she is proud and fully present. In my motherland, I broke down and understood what *lok yeay* and I shared.

Born and raised in the village of Chambak, Takeo province, *lok yeay* learned to weave from her mother at the age of 16. In her youth, she considered it a hobby and family members would buy her silk to make traditional skirts, outfits for weddings or special holidays like Pchum Ben or Chhnam Tmei—the Khmer new year in April. Though her mother wove intricate diamond patterns, a preferred style for elders, *lok yeay* emphasized solid, shiny colors in her craft, a style more appealing for younger women.

What I wish I could steal from my grandmother's artistry is the tapioca mixture she boiled overnight with coconut oil and other ingredients my mother and aunts have long forgotten. She would dip her fingers in the tapioca and sweep it across the silk, then take out any clumps with a brush. Fabric, like hair with added oils, needed to be combed out. This technique allowed her to thicken the material and create a gorgeous, soft luster.

Through poetry, I want to recreate her process. I want to dye words like colors and establish a unique texture on the page, like she did with silk. Turquoise. Cherry red. Gold. These

were the colors lok yeay was known for. At Cambodian weddings in Cleveland, Ohio, where her relatives lived, she wore her own fabrics, showing off dark purple hues while my mother donned a traditional golden skirt. Touching the fabric, several Cambodian women would ask, *Where did you get this?* and lok yeay would return home with orders of 100 yards or more. Many of her clients were local, from Hershey and Lebanon, but many others lived in Washington, DC; Lowell, Massachusetts; upstate New York; Louisiana; and Canada. Cambodian refugees took pride in lok yeay's weaving. Her craft insisted on the preservation of Cambodian culture in a new country. I wonder how many Cambodians got married wearing my grandmother's silk, how many lives she touched by connecting them with our culture.

As a poet, I pay attention to the stories that my family repeats. When my mother recalls the evacuation of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975—a day that many Cambodians remember—she likes to recall her experience of walking with lok yeay, behind the rest of the family. Side by side, they walked the same pace. Those three years, eight

months, and 20 days, lok yeay looked after our family and helped them survive. She held out hope for her eldest son, Samon, a lieutenant captain under the Lon Nol government who had been training in the United States. A few months before the decline of the Khmer Rouge, her husband died from forced labor and disease. She fled to Khao-I-Dang refugee camp in Thailand, and there, she and our family were sponsored by a Presbyterian church in Harrisburg. She was 65 years old when she resettled in the United States in 1981. She hoped to see Samon. Once she arrived, she learned that he had returned to Cambodia long ago, at the onset of the war.

Lok yeay stayed home alone while her daughters worked at a sewing factory downtown. She struggled with depression. She tried weaving with an American loom, but the feeling was not familiar to her. With the help of Joanna Roe, a woman from the Presbyterian church, a craftsman built a Cambodian-style floor loom for her. In 1982, she picked up weaving again and this helped her move toward healing.

Recently, I found a short video clip of her online. Onstage at the NEA National Heritage Fellowship Concert in 1990, lok yeay tells the audience in Khmer, *Pir thngai*. Two days. She took two days to weave this plaid fabric. From her lap, she takes the folded red and green design and opens it wide for the audience to see.

Weaving gave my grandmother a vocabulary so fine and textured, anyone could understand her story just by touching or eyeing her bright silks. She didn't know how to speak English fluently. When the phone rang, she'd pick up when nobody was around and say, *Hello. How are you?* And if the caller talked too much, she'd hang up. She would say the same line to me and my cousins as we played in the basement,



◀ Spools of silk for Em Bun's weaving. PHOTO COURTESY OF EM BUN

where she used to weave. There was a time when she could only stand at the top of the stairs, when she was too old to come down to her loom because her knees ached, because she could have fallen easily.

We could not speak to each other fluently in either English or Khmer. Often times, I would watch her and she would watch me. She would give me something to eat or call me to her garden, and I would hold her hand. She was the weaver in my family, and I am the poet. When I visit her house, I enter her old bedroom and open the

closet door to find the silk fabrics she made herself. I look closely at the skirts and know that she dyed two colors and wove them together, so a third color could shine. 🌀

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► Bun's granddaughter, Monica Sok, at Ta Prohm Temple in Cambodia.

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PRAKCHHIM SAY,
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