

CENTRAL'S JAZZ PROGRAM PRODUCES NCCU

By Warren D. Blackhear

The instruction of jazz - an American art form which derives from musicians with a special talent to create music while standing on their feet rather than from written scores - has come to North Carolina Central University (NCCU) through the efforts of a triumvirate of instructors and musicians.

And while jazz itself has been on college campuses before, the NCCU experimental jazz program has taken on an added dimension for the students and teachers. "We are trying to bridge the gap between the artist and the industry," says Donald Byrd, renowned trumpet player and president of Black Byrd Productions.

Byrd pointed out that most wealthy black people are performers, saying "Stevie Wonder made \$14 million last year." An accomplished musician with numerous records to his credit, Byrd added that the average "studio musician makes between \$50,000 - \$70,000 a year." Yet, he contends that college music programs do not prepare students to enter this lucrative

field but trains them to become music teachers."

The 44-year old musician who has been in the business for 34 years restated the well known fact that there is a tremendous amount of money in the music industry which is generated by blacks but is controlled by whites. A list of positions which benefit from performers includes managers, booking agents, promoters, engineers and lawyers, he said.

Byrd wants to change this by helping black college students with practical training "to meet the demands of the studio and to break into all facets of the industry." In order to do this, he said, the college must "strike a balance between intellectualism and pragmatism."

A producer, composer, and active musician, Byrd is one of the key ingredients of Central's jazz program. He serves as an adjunct professor in the jazz concentration, says Department Chairman Dr. Eugene Strassler.

Another key person who was responsible for pulling together the jazz program is Dr. Strassler, who came to Central eleven years ago. After he took over the department chairmanship, he said, he came into contact with several former stu-

dents who had dropped out of the music program. When seeking their reasons, he found that some of them wanted to play jazz professionally and they became bored with the teacher training courses.

When exploring what could be done to accommodate such students, Dr. Strassler says he realized that "jazz is a very illusive thing to teach," because it is done mentally rather than written out. It is mainly "an act of improvisation, with most of the creation being done on the spot," he related.

Eight years ago, Strassler said, he received a small grant to institute a series of workshops and lectures to develop a relevant jazz curriculum with visiting lecturers and students. From these beginnings, the jazz program is now in its second year and has blossomed into a working program which has borne fruit for some of its students.

The New Central Connection Unlimited, a group of five students and two faculty members have landed a recording contract with a major recording company. The group has written and recorded 16 original songs for their first album on the United Artists label which is scheduled to be re-



NCCU Chancellor Dr. Albert N. Whiting, Donald Byrd and Dr. Eugene Strassler discuss jazz program and related matters.

leased this month.

Another positive step forward came in the form of an announcement by Donald Byrd who said that negotiations have been completed with Queens International Theatrical Agency to provide on the job training in music and theatrical management for students from Central and other traditionally

black colleges.

The development of the jazz program was facilitated through a grant from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Advanced Institutional Development Program (AIDP). Monies from HEW provided the school with staff, faculty training, materials and supplies. It is also aided by

tuition scholarships from Black Byrd Productions.

Dr. Strassler reported that the jazz program instruction ranges from individual instruction to master classes for stage bands. Currently it reaches out to about 25 students with about twelve who are in the jazz concentration. Courses are taught in jazz

and keyboard improvisation, history of jazz, advanced jazz improvisation, jazz arranging, gospel and modern music; by three instructors.

At the conclusion of their instruction, the students will receive a bachelor of arts in music; however, the school hopes to bestow a degree in jazz in the future.

An exponent of change from a heavy emphasis on teacher training, Dr. Strassler admits that the program still has a way to go. Many of the students still express a desire to receive teacher certification.

In some cases this is an indication of having something to fall back on, he related.

The resources of Byrd and Strassler were combined with the organizational skills of Stanley V. Baird, a visiting lecturer. They made it possible for the New Central Connection Unlimited to be together at Central. Stan is also credited with organizing the popular Bite, Chew and Spit band as well as the jazz band at Central.

In conjunction with Byrd, Stan served as contact man or talent scout, reaching out to the musicians. Most of them, however, had responsibilities and could not afford to give up their normal sources of income.

This obstacle was overcome with the help of full tuition scholarships from Black Byrd Productions. Other expenses are met with income from playing weekend engagements in a tri-state area.

The leader of the New Central Connection, Stan says the group has rehearsals four to five days a week for three or more hours in addition to their normal load of course work. This rigorous schedule reached its peak when they were doing the studio work for their record. On three separate trips to California, they spent up to fourteen hours a day in the studio during the week recording sessions. Only eight of their eighteen songs will appear in the new album, Stan indicated.

Highly in favor of the industry tie in provided by Byrd, Dr. Strassler says this adds to the uniqueness of the jazz program.

The department chairman, obviously pleased with the recent developments, says the group is to be commended "for putting it together in a year's time." In academic terms, Dr. Strassler explained, to be given a contract with a major company is recognition of "a high degree of professional achievement and acceptance." It is also equivalent to publishing a major work since they wrote all original material for the album.

For Stan and the group, the contract is the result of long hard work and training which they hope will elevate them to another income bracket.

The photographs and brief biographies will introduce you to a product of NCCU's jazz program - THE NEW CENTRAL CONNECTION UNLIMITED!

NEW CENTRAL CONNECTION UNLIMITED



"STAN & BONNIE"



"CHARLIE"



"AARON"

Stanley W. Baird (Stan), leader, from Asheville is an instructor in the Jazz Program. He attended Knoxville College, and received his B. A. and M. A. degrees from NCCU in music. He also studied under Donald Byrd and Jerry Coker, and attended the University of Miami and Berklee College of Music. Stan was member of the U. S. Continental Army Command Band while he was in the army. He plays all saxophones and the flute. Stan plans to continue his education in the music field.

Charles V. Brown, percussionist, from Norfolk, Virginia is also an instructor. Charlie received his B. A. from Shaw University and his M. A. from North Carolina Central University. He plans to enter school in the spring to begin working toward his Ph.D. and hopes to complete this program within the next three years. Charles has experience with various local and professional bands.

Tomas (Bonnie) Clyde, from Shelby is a sophomore. He studied at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte before coming to NCCU. Bonnie plays keyboard, Arp Synthesizer, tenor and alto saxes, flute and is a vocalist. He has experience with numerous local and professional bands. Bonnie plans to obtain a B. A. and M. A. degree to help prospective musicians.

Clifton Cotton from Chapel Hill is a freshman. Cliff served three years in the Army

and he has played with various local bands. He is a vocalist and plays the keyboard. He plans to obtain a B. A. and M. A. degree and become a professional vocalist and instrumentalist.

William Norris Duckett (Country) from Brevard is also a freshman. He attended Central Piedmont Community College and has played with numerous local and professional bands. Country plays lead guitar, piano, violin, and is a vocalist. He plans to continue his education through the doctoral level with special training in guitars.

Aaron Mills, from Asheville is a freshman and he attended Central Piedmont also. He was greatly influenced by his father who sang with various professional artists during the early 1950's. Aaron is a vocalist and plays bass guitar, trumpet, and string bass. He has also played with various bands. His future plans are to become a great composer and play music for enjoyment.

Marion Albert Wiggins, Jr. (Mouse) music director from Durham, is a senior. Mouse has played with numerous professional bands of which he was leader, and also various local bands. His extensive travels and experiences with well-known artists and bands has encouraged him to continue his education and develop his talents professionally to make a great contribution in music. Mouse plays trumpet and all other brass instruments, strings, and has had lessons on reeds.



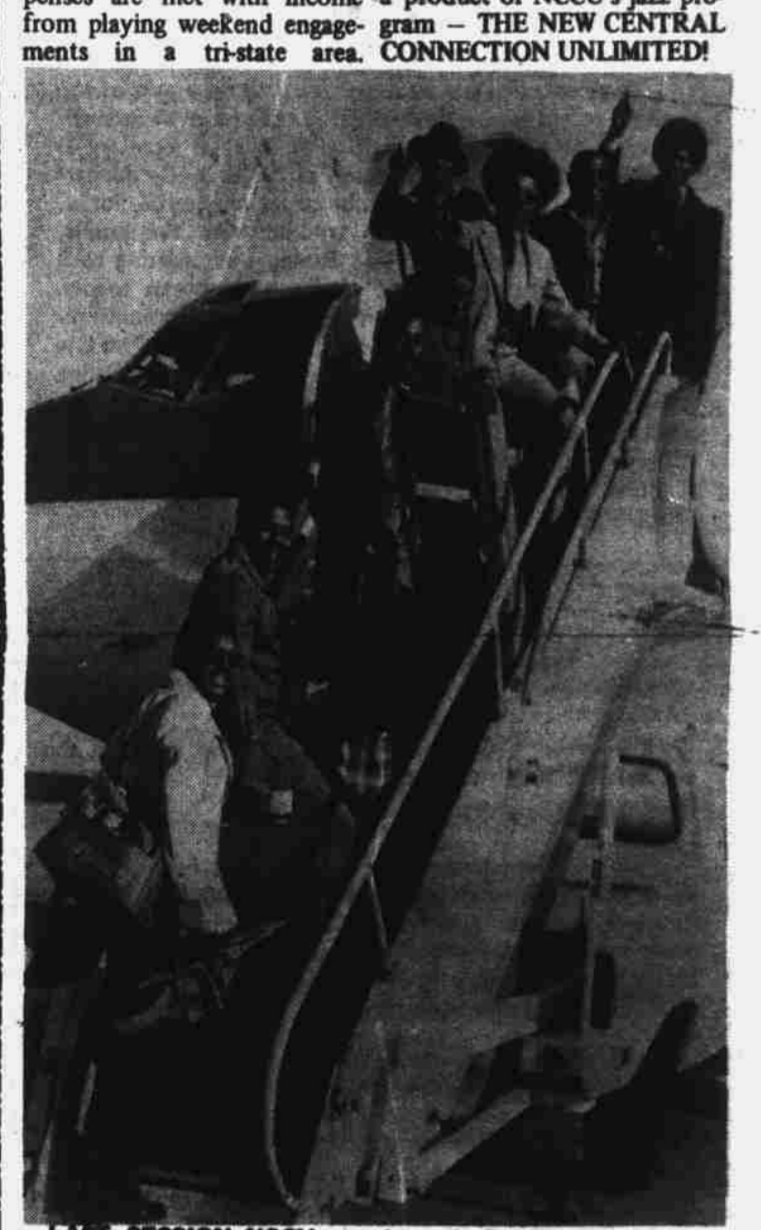
"CHARLIE"



"COUNTRY"



"COTTON"



LAST SESSION-NCCU members at Raleigh-Durham Airport preparing to fly United to California for their last recording session to complete their new album. (The Carolina Times photos by Blackhear)


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