

MUSIC WITH UNIVERSAL APPEAL

All That Jazz

By LES A. HAMASHIMA
Tar Heel Staff Writer

The clear, vibrant notes of the piano floated into the audience. The audience was a mixture of many ages and races, and the room hummed with whispered conversations as guests talked, drank and ate together. The pianist, Joseph Blair, better known as Brother Yusuf Salim, was in his element. He was getting people of different races, ages and social classes together through the music he loved: simple, classic jazz.

"Jazz was incubated on the continent

of America, but it has become universal," said Yusuf. "Jazz transcends racism and materialism and is a therapeutic art form for the whole planet."

Yusuf, who was born in Baltimore Md., on July 10, 1929, listened to Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie and Duke Ellington when he was growing up. "There was no bad music then," he said. "There were criteria for cultural status; you couldn't just buy your way into it."

Yusuf spoke about black musician's contributions to jazz. "As African-Americans, I think we have reached our

cultural epitome," he said. "We have produced music from people like Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday." He said that much of early jazz began in New Orleans, where African and European music was blended together.

"Music is a social and cultural reflection," Yusuf said. As customary after his performances, well-wishers moved toward the stage to meet Yusuf where he received them graciously. His genuine love for people is expressed by hugging, clasping of hands and use of the expressions "brother" and "sister." "I want to do everything I can to bring about peace on earth, and goodwill toward men in my small humble way in the name of Allah," he said. "Brother Yusuf is a humanitarian," said Kathy Johnson of Carrboro, a long-time friend of Yusuf's. "He reaches out to all people and tries to bring them together."

Yusuf, a Moslem, said his faith helped him to find peace and develop an identity. "I'd like to think that Islam is an Arabic word meaning 'peace'."

"We as humans, search for peace and struggle for identity. I wasn't born into peace or Islam, but in a sense it was the kind of struggle that we have as a people: confusion and the search for identity. I discovered peace through Islam."

The search for identity has been a major problem for African-Americans, Yusuf said. "As a 54-year-old African-American I've watched us jump and evolve from titles like nigger, negro and black," he said. "All of these titles are really a search for an identity." "We are going to have to reconcile the fact that we are a people of multinational identity." "I have come to the realization and the appreciation that God has blessed me to have the blood of at least two continents, Africa and Europe, running through my veins, and I feel good about that. I feel like a mediator with the bloods of conflicting factions

flowing through me."

At age 15, Yusuf became a heroin addict and remained addicted to the drug for 30 years. He said the addiction was a blessing in disguise because he was forced to socialize with whites when there was a strong black nationalistic movement. He was able to benefit from the movement without becoming a fanatic.

Besides his music, Yusuf also expresses his humanitarian love through community services that include the Clean-Up Squad and the Sallam Cultural Center in Durham. Yusuf is one of the founders of Durham's Sallam Cultural Center which provides a meeting area for local jazz musicians and community groups.

"The West End Clean-Up Squad keeps me young," Yusuf said. The Clean-Up Squad, which Yusuf has worked with for more than five years, cleans up litter and initiates community projects in the West End section of Durham. The purpose of the Squad is to promote community spirit and togetherness.

The name of Yusuf's band is *Yusuf and Friends*. The personnel of the band often changes because of schedules and improvisations but Yusuf said that there are some consistencies. "I am Yusuf and you are all my friends." Yusuf and Friends play frequently at nightclubs in the Triangle, and Yusuf accompanies many local jazz artists including Eve Cornelius and Constance Prince.

Yusuf and his wife Mary Salim have lived in Durham's West End with their daughters, Maryam, 7, and Chrystal, 14. He moved from Baltimore to Durham in 1974. "I love the temperature and the temperament," he said. "It's city enough to be 'hip' and country enough to be human."

Yusuf is responsible for bringing many other jazz musicians from Baltimore to the Triangle area. "When I got down here the ground was so virgin and had so much po-

tential, I called my brothers," he said. "When you find the promised land, you call the people you promised to call when you found the promised land."

Woodrow "Bus" Brown, of the area's oldest, active jazz vocalists, was one of these. "Bus' Brown is like a sage. A good human man and a sage," said Yusuf, who has known Brown for more than 40 years.

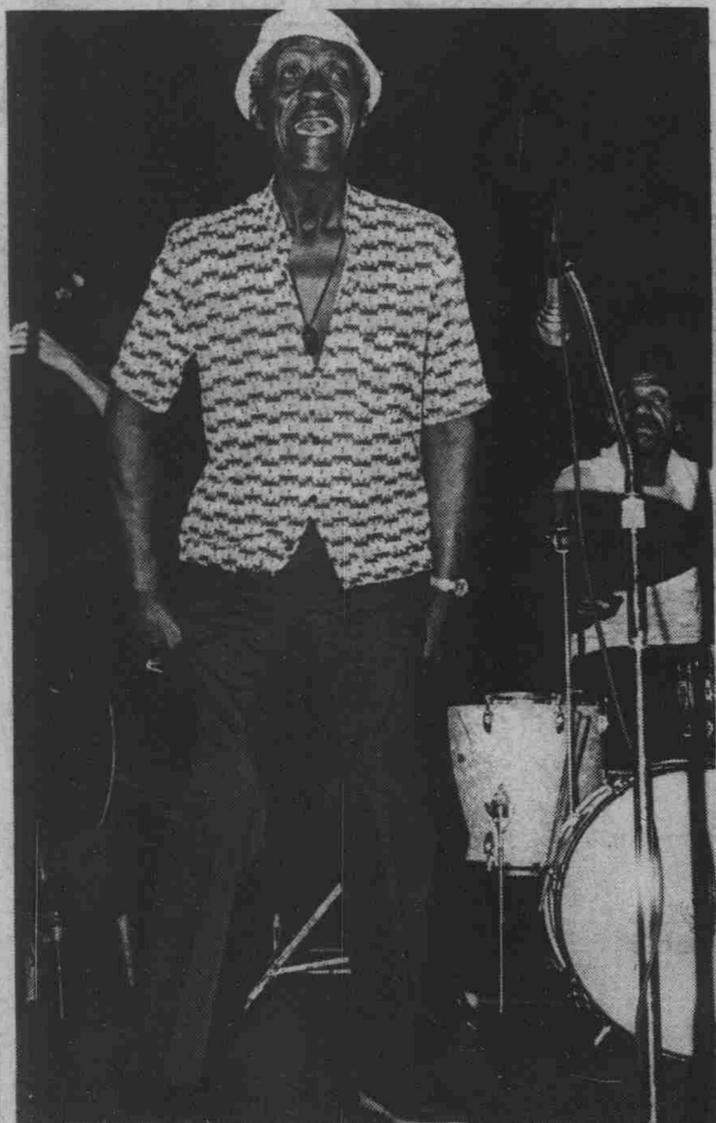
Yusuf and Brown work to help local aspiring jazz musicians and try to preserve classical jazz. "We need to pass the art form down," Yusuf said. "It's our duty and you don't get no medals for duty. If it (the art form of jazz) hadn't been passed down it wouldn't have gotten to us. It's a civilized man's duty to pass on cultural art and the heart."

Brown, a member of a Baltimore street gang as a youth, became interested in jazz as a teen-ager. He formed a singing group and toured with Ida Cox, a popular jazz singer, for three years. They eventually went out on their own and lived and worked in New York City and were called the Harlem Highlanders. Drugs, conflict between band members and the lifestyle of touring caused the group to break up after a tour of the United States and Europe.

After the break-up, Brown returned to Baltimore for two years until he formed a new band. This band was the opening act for prominent jazz artists including Ella Fitzgerald and Count Basie.

Returning to care for his invalid mother, Brown remained in Baltimore for 30 years until he moved to Durham in 1981.

Today is Brown's 76th birthday. There will be a celebration at the Chameleon Club in Durham with performances by jazz artists including Brother Yusuf, Eve Cornelius, and Constance Prince. Tickets are \$8 at the door and reservations are accepted.

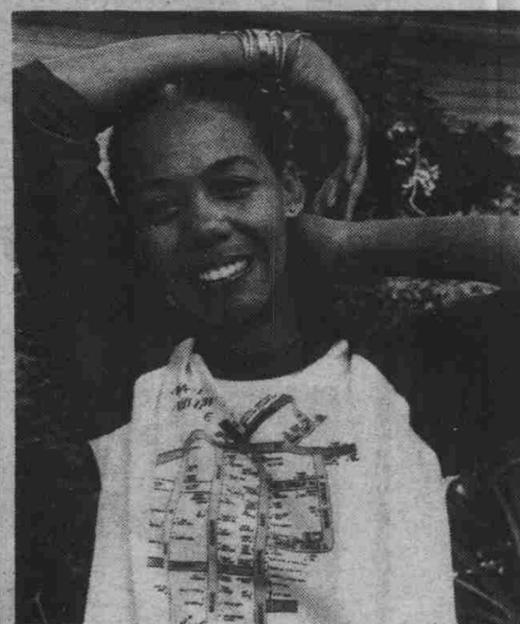


Tar Heel/Lori Thomas

Bus Brown performing at the ArtSchool in Carrboro
...his concert is part of the Jazz Concert series

"Jazz transcends racism and materialism and is a therapeutic art form for the whole planet."

—Brother Yusuf Salim



Tar Heel/Joel Katzenstein

Dynamic Constance Prince
...filled with peace and love for life

Lady Sings the B

By JOEL KATZENSTEIN
Tar Heel Arts & Features Editor

For music lovers who want to find an artist with the style of Roberta Flack, the range of Sarah Vaughn and the personality of Billie Holliday, they need look no further than Durham, the home of Constance Prince.

A performer of jazz, rhythm and blues, pop and gospel, Constance Prince is likely to be one of the best artists that this area has ever known. At a performance Tuesday night in the Carolina Union, Ms. Prince made musical love to a very receptive audience. "Her music is so moving — both emotionally and spiritually, that I came away feeling that I've been through some kind of religious experience," an exuberant member of the audience explained.

Prince has made regular appearances at the Union for the past three years, and each time her audience grows bigger and stronger. With no fewer than 300 people in attendance at Tuesday evening's performance, Prince can be credited with much more than getting up and singing. Her music, like her attitude, is filled with peace and love for life, and it is indeed a religious experience to be in her presence—both on stage and off.

Sultry and even slightly seductive on stage, Prince has a

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