

D Section

A & E

A novelist's idea

E. Lynn Harris parlays dream into lucrative career

By Cheris F. Hodges

June is here and some of the hottest African American fiction writers are coming to Charlotte

Things get started with a visit from best selling author E. Lynn Harris Sunday at Joseph-Beth Bookseller in the SouthPark area.

Harris is touring in support of his new novel, "I Say A Little Prayer."

It's been four years between Harris novels. He's been busy teaching.

"I teach creative writing and African American literature at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville," his alma mater.

When asked which he likes best, Harris said he doesn't have to choose. "I'm fortunate to have two things that I'm passionate about," he said.

Harris said he's also lucky to have fans who come out and support his writing no matter the subject "I don't take that for granted," he said.

Fourteen years ago, Harris said he just wanted to write one book and see

where that would take him.

Harris sold computers for IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and AT&T for 13 years while living in Dallas, Washington, D.C. and Atlanta. He finally quit his sales job to write his first novel, "Invisible Life," and, failing to find a publisher, he published it himself in 1991 and sold it mostly at black-owned bookstores, beauty salons, and book clubs before he was "discovered" by Anchor Books. Anchor published "Invisible Life" as a trade paperback in 1994 and thus his career as an author was "officially" launched.

With all the talk about men on the down low, Harris said, it's nothing new.

"It wasn't new 14 years ago and it isn't new now," he said.

"But what is new is "I Say A Little Prayer?"

Chauncey Greer is the owner of The Cute Boy Card Company, a thriving company in Atlanta. As a teenager, he was a member of a popular boy band, but left in disgrace when word got out that he and his bandmate D had

become much more than good friends. A free spirit now on the brink of 40, Chauncey has always hooked up with both men and women. With the age of the "down low" making women more cautious, however, Chauncey has been focusing on the guys

After one too many bad dates, Chauncey finds himself in church, where the minister's message inspires him to follow his dream of a musical career once again. Although he's lost touch with D, as he starts writing songs his thoughts inevitably turn to his former lover Chauncey's smashing performance at the church earns him a standing ovation and an invitation to participate in an upcoming revival.

But Chauncey soon discovers that an ambitious fundamentalist preacher plans to use the revival to speak out against gays and gay marriage. Feeling angry and betrayed, Chauncey and other gay members of the church decide to take a stand against the church's homophobia by staging a Please see HARRIS/2D



Perry's strong on the classics

Phil Perry Classic Love Songs Chris Davis, producer Shanachie Records



Phil Perry's soaring tenor can be polarizing. You either love the way Perry can sing as high as a woman or you find it annoying. There doesn't seem to be much middle ground.

Either Perry took heed to some of his critics or he can't hit those high notes anymore. Not once does he go for one of those stratospheric notes that make you pick up the CD cover and ask 'was that a man?'

Instead, Perry has found a comfortable middle ground. His tenor sounds as strong as ever but he's more smoky jazz cafe than blaring disco club. "Classic Love Songs" is a heartfelt tribute to songs that shaped Perry as an artist. He does a masterful job of making these songs fresh and appealing in a light but full-bodied soul style.

Perry's new approach is gracefully elegant. He's chosen a bunch of songs that have been done, redone and even butchered at times. Yet, his tenor is so intoxicatingly sweet every song seems fresh.

Some of the credit must go to producer Chris "Big Dog" Davis. He keeps Perry's vocals as the centerpiece of each song. The arrangements are sparse and often aren't even in the same ballpark as the original song. On "I'll Be Around," Perry is breezy and jazzy instead of taking the R&B dance route of the original Lionel Richie's "Hello" is also given a jazzy treatment that's way different from the original. The flute solo takes this song to another level.

Even when Perry sticks close to the original, he shines. "Just My Imagination," "Hey There Lonely Girl" and "La La Means I Love You" are done with such meticulous care that you're glad he doesn't deviate much from the original.

I would have liked for Perry to be more adventurous at times. One of those high notes would have been welcomed. But the gorgeous treatment he's given these timeless songs is most appreciated.



Author posits stereotypes to expose racial divisions

By Aisha Lide

Can blacks really be identified by the five senses?

According to Mark Smith PhD., an English instructor at the University of South Carolina, the answer is no.

"The southern race relations and the construction of racial difference on which that history is built cannot be understood fully on the basis of sight alone," he said. "We must explore the sensory dynamics underpinning the

deeply emotional construction of race."

Smith, an Englishman and author of "How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses," lectured last Thursday at the Charlotte Museum of History. His time was spent dealing with the politically incorrect thinking his research found in the South. Stereotypes were blatantly public back in the day: black people smelled, the skin was especially thick and insensitive. People of African descent were also purported to have

poor taste both aesthetically and literally - their tongues could not appreciate good food and were prone to noisy outbursts.

Even when meant as compliments, the stereotypes were backhanded. Blacks were also believed to have more heightened senses, could see and hear better and pick up scents that whites couldn't. In other words, blacks' senses were portrayed as like those of animals. "These sensory stereotypes were used to justify slavery and segregation," said Smith. Throughout the lecture

Smith quoted from letters written by whites showing the thinking of the time.

"I promised you an impolite topic," he said. "This is not a nice thing to research."

The examples he gave in the lecture were definitely degrading

"This is a tough conversation," said Thomas Moore PhD., a member of the audience.

"Vision can be blinding sometimes, especially when it comes to history," Smith said. "For various reasons, historians have been accustomed to see the past, always search-

ing for perspective. My effort is simple, if ambitious. I want to restore the importance of the non-visual senses-smell, taste, touch, and hearing to our understanding of the past."

Smith is the author or editor of six previous books.

"These sensory stereotypes were used to justify slavery and segregation," said Smith.

GALLERY REVIEW

Lazzarini's 'Seen/Unseen' worth a look at Mint Museum

By Sandy Seawright

"Robert Lazzarini Seen/Unseen"

Through July 16

Mint Museum of Art 2730 Randolph Road

Art is subjective and everyone's opinion counts.

Now, sculptor Robert Lazzarini challenges the comfort zone of our own subjectivity.

Drop your idea of what a desk telephone looks like as

you surrender to Lazzarini's imagination at look at his work, "phone," 2000 made of plastic, metal, rubber and paper. This desk phone looks like it has been run over by a steam roller - but not totally! Though the spring phone cord between the base and the receiver is as flat as a metal watchband the base still has enough dimension to connect us to what we know a phone to look like. All of his sculptures are projected out

from the wall into empty, negative space, on clear rods which give them a freedom from association with anything else.

Lazzarini is a teacher leading us to new perspectives. "table, notebook and pencil," created in 2004, and owned by Charlotte area collectors, shows us why Lazzarini's work is art and not just special effects like something you would see in an action movie or animated cartoon. The "S"

shape of the wooden table which has the sweep of a roller coaster is so thoughtfully created. This isn't art about impact - it's art for contemplation.

The table is so graceful, the pink notebook and the standard yellow pencil with eraser look like they're fresh from Office Depot and should have already slid to the floor.

"skulls," 2000, made of resin, bone, and pigment from the collection of the

famous art collector Peter Norton of Santa Monica, California allow us to see an object from four different perspectives. One skull is flattened vertically while another is flattened horizontally. As we look at these works from the side we see even more of the sculptor's thoroughness and richness.

"hammers," 2000, made of oak, steel and pigment show us how Lazzarini makes the ordinary interesting

Black organ donation latest message in novelist's sequel

By Cheris F. Hodges

Author Parry "EbonySatin"

Brown takes her responsibility as writer seriously. While her books may be fun to read, there is always a message in them.

In her latest novel, "What Goes Around," Brown tackles the issue of organ donation. An extremely personal issue to her because she's had family members who died from kidney disease.

"We as African American writers have a responsibility to enlighten as we entertain," she said. "If this book causes

one person to save a life or register and tell their family that they are an organ donor then I have served my purpose."

Brown, who is in the middle of planning her wedding, hasn't put the pen down. She's hard at work on her next release as she tours on the west coast.

"What Goes Around" is a sequel to her wildly popular debut, "The Shirt Off His Back" However, the book

isn't as preachy as some others in the genre. "That speaks to my personality," said Brown. "I've been a Christian all my life and we have to live to people."

She said her spirituality comes across in the way she treats people in day to day living. "I bring across the same thing in my writing," Brown said.

Though she doesn't have any immediate plans to come to Charlotte, you know she is getting married in about 45 days, Brown said she loves the Carolinas and plans to visit the area in the fall.

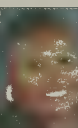
Some may consider Brown's stories Christian fiction, but it

She's also working on "Never on Sunday" a story about a preacher's wife who goes bad.

"That's what has happened at my church," she said. "The pastor and his first wife were divorced and she didn't leave the church."

Though many of her books are based on people in her life, which adds to the realism of the novels, Brown said the subjects never know it and she doesn't tell them.

"It's really funny because they take the good characteristics and identify with them," she said



Brown

Ratings section with star icons and text: Classic, Excellent, Good, Fair, Why?, No stars - A mess