

Jazz artist, Donald Byrd named Artist in Residence

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Delaware State University announced today that internationally renowned jazz musician Dr. Donaldson T.L. Byrd – commonly known in the jazz world as Donald Byrd – has been named as a distinguished artist-in-residence at the institution.

As a distinguished artist-in-residence, Dr. Byrd will conduct master classes and give lectures, conduct fundraising on behalf of DSU, participate in performances when appropriate and serve as an ambassador for DSU.

“We are inspired by the fact that Dr. Donald Byrd is a legend who represents for the young people all that they work and strive for,” said DSU Acting President Claibourne Smith. “We are honored to have such a legendary person with his artistry and thirst for excellence.”

Dr. Byrd served as a distinguished artist-in-residence at DSU from 1996 to 2001. After pursuing other projects elsewhere, the legendary jazz musician has decided to return to DSU.

As an expression of his renewed commitment to the University, the famed musician has established a \$10,000 endowed scholarship fund in his name that will benefit music students at DSU.

In announcing the endowment, Dr. Byrd drew a parallel between his life and the life of famed jazz trumpeter Clifford Brown, an influential 1950s musician who attended DSU (then-Delaware State College).

“Like my father I never drank or smoked.... Clifford Brown didn’t drink or smoke,” Dr. Byrd said. “This school is outstanding, and here I am just trying to follow in (Brown’s) footsteps.”

Dr. Byrd, a professional jazz musician since the 1950s, became known as one of the top trumpeters of the jazz “hard-bop” genre as he performed with musicians such as John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Herbie Hancock and Thelonious Monk. Ironically at one point in the 1950s, Dr. Byrd actually replaced Clifford Brown in Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers band.

In the 1970s, Dr. Byrd began to record jazz fusion that combined jazz with funk, soul and R&B. While teaching music at Howard University in 1974, Dr. Byrd formed a jazz fusion group that consisted of his best students and called them the Blackbyrds. The group produced the 1972 album *Black Byrd*, which became Blue Notes Records’ highest-ever selling album. In the 1990s, Dr. Byrd jazz fusion explorations expanded to the hip-hop genre.

Dr. Byrd has recorded 38 jazz albums and performed on countless other musicians’ recording projects. In 2002, the National Endowment for the Arts recognized Dr. Byrd as one of its NEA Jazz Masters. As an educator, Dr. Byrd has developed a “Music + Math = Art” education program that he has introduced to youth across the country.

A native of Detroit, Mich., Dr. Byrd is an alumnus of Wayne State University and the Manhattan School of Music. In 1982 he earned a Ed.D from Columbia Teachers College of New York City.

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