



Big Chief Donald Harrison Comes To The Big Apple

New Orleans Jazz Legend To Play NYC's Symphony Space

by Tom Pryor

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Longtime Nat Geo Music readers must know by now that we are big, big fans of the HBO Original series Treme, and of the traditional musics and culture of New Orleans in general - especially NOLA's unique Mardi Gras Indian tradition.

So it should be no surprise to find out that we were especially excited when we heard that saxman "Big Chief" Donald Harrison was coming to town this month - because Harrison is not only one of NOLA's most versatile and respected jazz artists; and he's not just another recurring, real-life fixture on Treme, but he's an honest-to-goodness "Big Chief" of the Congo Nation Afro-New Orleans Cultural Group - a direct link to the same tradition that brought us everything from the Wild Magnolias to the Dixie Cups. So you know it's gonna be a funky good time - and that the roots will run deep!



An Evening with the Big Chief Donald Harrison is scheduled for Friday, April 27th, and New York's venerable Symphony Space, and will include a special guest performance by Grammy Nominated trumpeter Christian Scott.

Here's what the official press release had to say about the event:

Big Chief Donald Harrison merges the sounds of the New Orleans Jazz Fest and Big Apple Jazz with a special guest performance by Grammy Nominee Christian Scott.

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by Grammy Nominee Christian Scott. Saxophonist Donald Harrison is a musical category unto himself. A master of every dimension of the jazz trajectory - from New Orleans roots to bebop and beyond - Harrison is uniquely qualified to represent the links between the traditional and the contemporary in jazz.

Born in New Orleans in 1960, Donald Harrison grew up in an environment saturated with the city's traditional music of brass bands, parades and dances. His connection to New Orleans roots was deepened by his father, a Big Chief in the African-influenced culture of the Mardi Gras Indians. Harrison studied at the Berklee School of Music in Boston, and from there joined the

band of drummer Roy Haynes. A year later he became one of the select few to work with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers. Throughout his career, Harrison has been at the vanguard of modern jazz while continuing his participation in New Orleans' culture: now the Big Chief of the Congo Square Nation, he keeps the offshoot rituals, call and response chants, and drumming alive for the next generation. Donald Harrison's current project, the eight-piece ensemble Congo Square Nation, melds cutting edge jazz with New Orleans funk - connecting the past with the present in a music that transcends boundaries.

Always an innovator, Harrison combined jazz with Mardi Gras Indian traditional music with his critically-acclaimed "Indian Blues" (1993). He is the founder and "King of Nouveau Swing" " which is his style of jazz that merges the soulful sounds he grew up with in New Orleans with modern dance music into a swinging New York context. Harrison has performed with an illustrious list of distinguished musicians in Jazz, R & B, Funk, Classical and more: Art Blakey, Roy Haynes, Miles Davis, Lena Horne, Ron Carter, Billy Cobham, Eddie Palmieri, Jennifer Holiday, Dr. John, Guru's Jazzmatazz, Digable Planets, Notorious BIG, The Chicago Symphony Orchestra and The Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra.

Aspects of Harrison's life and music have been chronicled in David Simon's ground breaking HBO series, Treme. Harrison appears as himself in seven episodes based on his own life.

As an actual evacuee/survivor of Hurricane Katrina, Harrison appears in Spike Lee's HBO special When the Levees Broke.

Harrison appeared in and co-wrote the sound track for Academy Award winning director Jonathan Demme's feature film, Rachel's Getting Married starring Anne Hathaway.

Harrison the jazz master has taught an impressive list of gifted musicians, including trumpeter Christian Scott, trombonist/singer Trombone Shorty, guitarist Josh Connolly and saxophonists Louis Fouche, Chris Royal and Aaron Fletcher. His working groups have proven to be an incubator for jazz band leaders such as guitarist Mark Whitfield, pianist Cyrus Chestnut and bassists Christian McBride, Dwayne Burno, and Esperanza Spaulding - all of whom spent time playing with Harrison.

His many awards include France's "Grand Prix du Disque", Switzerland's "The Ascona Award", Japan's Swing Journal "Alto Saxophonist of the Year", The Jazz Journalist Association's "A List Award", Jazziz Magazine's "Person of the Year", and the Big Easy Music Awards "Ambassador of Music".