

ROXANNE STEVENSON



**Eleventh Annual  
Donald Meade Legacy  
Jazz Griot Award**

**Roxanne Stevenson**

**January 6, 2022**



**DONALD MEADE LEGACY  
JAZZ GRIOT AWARD**

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## What is a Griot?

***The Griot emerged from West African traditions as a storyteller, historian, chronicler and keeper of the timeline. The Griot in short, remembers through word and song all of the important events and experiences of a particular community. The Griot holds sacred the collective memory of a community preserving it for posterity.***

The Donald Meade Legacy Society in conjunction with the African American Jazz Caucus confers the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Donald Meade Legacy Jazz Griot Award to a major motivator, Roxanne Stevenson.

Roxanne Stevenson was raised in a community where music played an essential part in life. Her grandmother sang and her mom was her pianist at church. Roxanne wanted to play piano. Her father bought her a piano, on which she practiced religiously, so her mother arranged for piano lessons with Mrs. Harris, a valued teacher and major motivator. All her friends played music, and many bands were being tried and tested in the neighborhood.

In the mid 70's she attended Chicago Vocational School under the tutelage of the legendary Dr. Harold Bray who had a major music program at a Chicago HS. Several of his students became high achievers in the music industry: Rolling Stones, Emotions, and Earth Wind & Fire.

"I had been studying the piano since I was 9 years old, but you can't play that in the band," Stevenson said. "When I asked Dr. Bray for help in choosing an instrument, he told me my long fingers would be good for either the oboe or the bassoon. But I wasn't sold on either." One evening, Stevenson saw a man playing the saxophone on a television program. "The people were screaming and hollering and I said to myself, 'That's what I want to play.' My mom told me it was a saxophone, and we looked it up in the encyclopedia."

In school her choice was treated with little enthusiasm. Bray still wanted her to play the oboe, a rare and difficult instrument the band owned, and would have lent her without cost. "You can't gig on an oboe," she said. "Besides my mind was made up for the sax," said Stevenson. "If you really insist on the saxophone," Bray told her "Tell your mama to send a letter saying that she will pay \$1,000 to buy you a Selmer Mark VI alto sax." Stevenson's mother agreed. Years earlier, she had asked her high school band teacher for the same instrument and was told they weren't "wasting saxophones on women." She settled for a clarinet instead.

Roxanne Stevenson is Professor of Music Education and Director of Bands, Music Ed and Gospel Music Coordinator and Woodwind Instructor at Chicago State University. She earned a B.S. from Bethune-Cookman University and the M.S. degree from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, both in music education.

Professor Stevenson is the Jazz Coordinator of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities-National Band Director's Consortium and Interim Vice-President of the African American Jazz Caucus. She serves as a panelist for the Illinois Arts Council, director and master class teacher for the Chicago Jazz Philharmonic and the Fine Arts Camp. She serves as adjudicator, panelist and guest director for numerous marching, concert and jazz festivals and competitions and has worked as band/choral director and classroom/music teacher in Illinois and Indiana elementary schools and high schools.

The Chicago State University Jazz Band started in 1992 by Professor Stevenson has presented clinics and performances at the Illinois Music



Education Association All State Conference, Indiana festivals, the Midwest Clinic Band and Orchestra Clinic, National Association for Negro Musicians Centennial Conference and the Jazz Education Network Conference. Professor Stevenson also started the Chicago State University Community Concert Band, Gospel

Ensemble, Marching Band and created curriculum and coordinated the BA in Music: Gospel Music Concentration. Professor Stevenson is a contributor to the textbook "Teaching Music Through Performance in Jazz" Volume I and Volume II, and the books Rehearsing the Jazz Band and The Horizon Leans Forward.

Stevenson is a member of the Women Band Directors International Diversity Committee, Illinois Music Education Association, Jazz Education Network, Jazz Education Network's Sisters in Jazz Committee, and National Association for Music Education. She received the African American Arts Alliance of Chicago's Black Excellence Award for Outstanding Achievement in Music –Jazz. The Absolute Winds of Change, a Tribute to Chicago's African-American Women in Jazz recognized her as a saxophonist/educator, and she received a Christian Girls Rock award. Professor Stevenson is the mother of two girls, Morgan and Bailey.