

DR. BARRY HARRIS



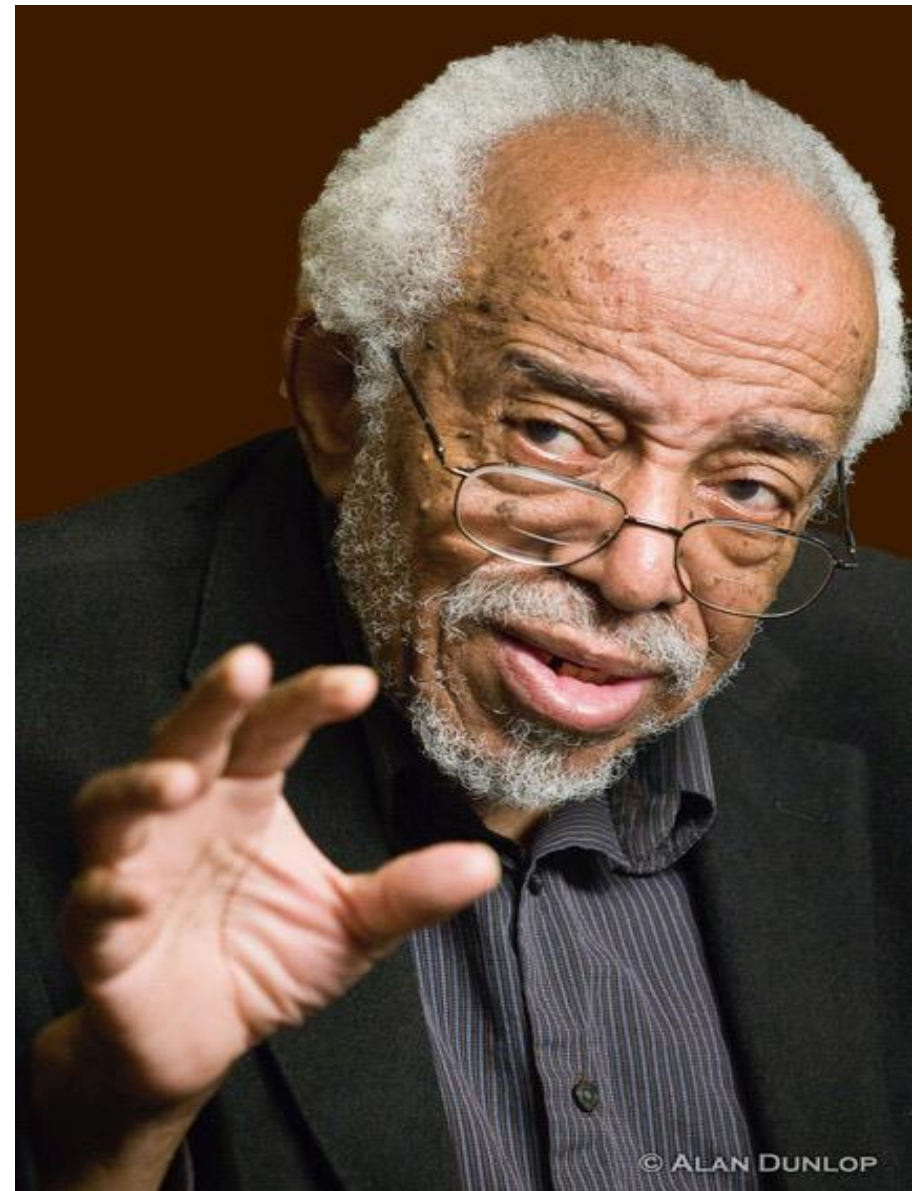
Tenth Annual

Donald Meade Legacy

Jazz Griot Award

Dr. Barry Harris

January 7, 2021



**DONALD MEADE LEGACY
JAZZ GRIOT AWARD**

JANUARY 7, 2021

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 10th Annual Donald Meade Legacy Jazz Griot Award to the esteemed artist Dr. Barry Harris.

Harris was born ten days before Christmas in Detroit in 1929. His piano studies began at age four with his mother (a church pianist), who gave him the choice of classical music or jazz. In his teens he learned the bebop largely by ear, imitating solos by Powell. He claimed Powell's style was the "epitome" of jazz.

He is part of an exceptional crew of Detroit-bred jazz musicians including Tommy Flanagan, Alice Coltrane, Pepper Adams, and Donald Byrd, who rose through the Motor City's extraordinary public school arts education programs during the '30s and '40s. The pianist devoted himself to bebop in the '40s after seeing Charlie Parker play a concert in Detroit. While learning his chops, Harris initiated his own career, playing high school dances and various other functions around Detroit and developed into a jazz pianist whose harmonic and melodic gifts made him a talented teacher as well.

Dr. Harris is an award-winning, influential pianist, composer, and instructor, an NEA Jazz Master, and a member of the American Jazz Hall of Fame. He is critically regarded as one of the major hard bop stylists to emerge from the second half of the 20th century. His fleet-fingered style and rich, complex chording architecture and harmonic system have been captured on dozens of recordings as a leader and sideman. He has taught his playing techniques at many music schools and institutions across the globe.

In an era when Detroit boasted an intensely vital jazz scene, Harris was at the center of the action. Though the city possessed a wealth of keyboard talent, he maintained a steady stream of coveted house gigs. Hank Jones had already moved to New York by the time Harris established himself. He soon attracted a national following as his reputation spread via the musicians' grapevine. "A lot of piano players, like Sonny Clark, came to Detroit looking for me," Harris says. "Most of the Detroiters came through my house. Roland Hanna and Sonny Red would climb those stairs to learn

those chords. Joe Henderson came for lessons. John Coltrane came to my house and wanted to know what I was teaching. I ended up being a teacher because I knew a little bit more. It happened without me knowing."

Alto saxophonist Charles McPherson credits his teenage apprenticeship with Harris as an essential chapter in his musical education. "He was just beginning to organize his methodology," McPherson says. "He always leaned toward showing people things about harmony and theory, and his house was always a hub of activity. Musicians would come by and hang out with him. In 1960, Harris migrated to New York following Flanagan and Byrd, where he got work playing with Adderley, Hawkins, Wes Montgomery Morgan, Mobley, Lateef, Carmell Jones, and his former student McPherson. He met Baroness Pannonica de Koenigswarter -- patroness of the New York jazz scene who befriended him and introduced him to Monk, whom he roomed with at her house in New Jersey.

In 1982, Harris partnered with Larry Ridley, Jim Harrison, and Frank Fuentes to create the Jazz Cultural Theater in New York City. The Theater was primarily a performance venue featuring prominent jazz artists and also hosted jam sessions. It was known also for the music classes Harris offered to vocalists and instrumentalists, each taught in separate sessions.

Although Dr. Harris' teaching style is famously unorthodox, jazz studies programs like that of the New School have begun to adopt his approach to building technique, especially his unique harmonic theory. He was named a "Legend of Jazz Education" at the 2019 Jazz Education Network (JEN) Annual Conference in Reno, Nev.

Combining traditional and innovative methods, the Harris approach to improvisation is fundamentally different from the methods prevalent in jazz academia that encourage students to match each chord with a particular scale. Instead, Dr. Harris teaches his students to focus on the melodic and harmonic flow of the original song. -

Above all, Dr. Harris uses his talent and platform as an artist to create, uplift and educate. Despite his acclaim and recognition, he offers lessons at minimal cost to all levels of musicians and music lovers. He has an everybody is welcome, come-one, come-all philosophy. "It's the most beautiful thing you want to hear in your life," Dr. Harris said of the sound of a musician whose skills improve after working with him.

For more information visit: www.barryharris.com