



**HOWARD UNIVERSITY**  
for the degree of  
**DOCTOR OF MUSIC**  
to  
**BENNY GOLSON**

MAY 10, 2014

Benny Golson, Iconic Globally-Renowned Tenor Saxophonist and National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master, Prolific Composer, Lyricist, Arranger and Producer, your extraordinary and illustrious career of some 63 years, beginning in 1951 when, after studying music for three years at Howard University, you first worked with Tiny Grimes and later joined Bull Moose Jackson, you were revered by your renowned peers

and loving fans alike. Having recorded over 30 albums under your own name and with other major artists and written well over 300 compositions, you are the only living jazz artist to have written eight standards for jazz repertoire. It is your distinctive compositions such as the widely recorded *"Along Came Betty," "I Remember Clifford"* (for your friend the great Clifford Brown at his untimely death), *"Killer Joe,"* a huge hit for Quincy Jones, and *"Whisper Not,"* to name a few, your work in film and television such as the soundtracks for *M\*A\*S\*H, Mission Impossible, Mod Squad, Room 222, Ironside, The Academy Awards, Specials* for the major American networks as well as BBC and other European networks, and the theme for *Cosby*, among others, and your exemplary contributions to jazz education for the now and next generations that are the hallmarks of your remarkably unique and productive life and career. Meeting pianist Tadd Dameron in Jackson's band *"ignited the spark"* you said in a Down Beat interview...*"I wanted to do more than play tenor sax. I wanted to write."*

Your foundation was built on hallowed ground early on as you played with the bands of Dizzy Gillespie—traveling in the 1950s on US State Department tours, Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, Lionel Hampton, Earl Bostic and Benny Goodman. With Art Farmer you co-founded and led the successful group, Jazztet, featuring Curtis Fuller and McCoy Tyner, which won the New Star Award in the 1960 Down Beat International Poll. James Moody was the first to record one of your compositions—*"Blues Walk;"* and then to your surprise Miles recorded *"Stablemates"*. A genuine innovator, you have composed and arranged for a virtual who's who of musical artists, including Count Basie, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Sammy Davis, Jr., Shirley Horn, Lou Rawls, Diana Ross, Carmen McRae, Peggy Lee, Itzhak Perlman, Oscar Peterson, Mel Torme, George Shearing, and Dusty Springfield, among others. Also, you have written extensively for some of the major advertising agencies in the country, creating national radio and television commercials for the following products: Chevrolet, Chrysler, Nissan, Dodge, Canada Dry, Carnation, Clorox, Heinz Foods, McDonald's, Gillette, Mattel Toys, Monsanto, Pepsi Cola, and Texaco, to name some.

The musical odyssey of your life has taken you around the world for over five decades, including but not limited to: a US State Department cultural tour of Southeast Asia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma, Singapore; all over the United States and Europe; South America; Japan; and a commission from Philip Morris International to write music for the Bangkok Symphony Orchestra. The recipient of honorary degrees from William Patterson University and the Berklee College of Music, you have shared your captivating storytelling and immerse multi-talents with audiences at Lincoln Center through a special series created by Wynton Marsalis, and lectured to doctoral candidates at New York University and to faculty at the National University at San Diego, as well as numerous mentoring occasions.

In 1996, Howard University Professor and HU Jazz Ensemble Director Fred Irby, III, created The Benny Golson Jazz Master Award to honor your living legacy. Presented annually, to date over 40 awards have been given with concerts by the awardees, with you as the first.

A native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, you credit your mother as your major influence and for her unwavering support as you pursued your dreams through music, first beginning in childhood on piano before picking the saxophone. You mention your close friendship with John Coltrane when you both were teenagers just starting out. You two spent time in your living room listening to 78 lps. You recall a time when you both were lamenting not being picked for a well-known band, and your mother encouraged you by telling you not to despair... one day you two would be the star headliners and it came to pass at the well-known Newport Jazz Festival. You felt very fortune to have had this strong family support, which was not a given in your circle. In high school before coming to Howard, you jammed in Philly with Percy and Jimmy Heath, Philly Joe Jones, Johnny Coles and many more youngsters who became giants of jazz.

You and your wife Bobbi reside in New York City, New York.

Benny Golson, you are a quiet giant jazz icon whose intuitive innovation, musical genius, ease of personality, stellar character and integrity live forever more through your compositions, performances, teaching, and mentoring, creating anew an incredible legacy in your own right for the world. Your extraordinary talents and unparalleled contributions epitomize the cherished core values of the *Capstone—Leadership, Excellence, Truth, and Service*. It is with heartfelt respect and utmost pride and admiration that we name you a *son* of Howard and honor you on the historic occasion of our 146<sup>th</sup> Commencement, conferring upon you the degree, Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*. Congratulations!

Addison Barry Rand  
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## *BENNY GOLSON'S HONORARY DOCTORATE*

As a growing kid in Philadelphia, like most kids, I had silly dreams that would never be fulfilled. I often dreamed that somehow I had miraculously developed the ability to fly, and I would fly around the neighborhood as all my little friends looked on in amazement. Or even more dynamic, my comic book heroes evoked more silly dreams in which I often thought of myself as strong and redoubtable as The Hulk, Superman, and Captain Marvel. Nobody dared mess with *me!* But as immutable time moved ahead disappointingly ignoring such transient silliness and the sometime silly blather that so often accompanies such nonsense, my dreams began to evolve into something far different and more meaningful. Yes, my dreams had morphed into things that were realistic and possible of becoming a reality, depending on circumstances and the person, of course.

For example, at nine years of age I decided I wanted to become a concert pianist. Thus, I began piano lessons with Spartan-like practice. No baseball or cowboys and Indians. But like most kids, overwhelming distractions can often change their course of life, and even noble intentions have been known to run out of gas. Yes, you guessed it! At fourteen I heard the sound of that darned saxophone, and the piano faded into obscurity as I drove my neighbors crazy. It was then that I met John Coltrane. He joined me as a fellow amateur in my living room on the front of my house. During those hot, summer months when the windows were wide open, the neighbors then wanted to kill *two people*. But we both got better, thank goodness.

But later, as a high school student, and because of Mr. Rosenberg, I became extremely interested in the English language and all things related to it. I approached it with the same 'fire' I had for my music. And even later yet, I found myself at the front door of Howard University as a part of the class of '51. I was as an open-mouthed, famished chick in the nest anticipating the food and nutrition of knowledge. It seems as if Mr. Carroll was waiting for me. He took me deeper into the intricacies of the English language as I carried my saxophone under my arm heading for the many practice rooms available. My life was now demanding critical decisions as I stretched and reached, guided by Howard University's tutelage and my imagination. Imagination!? Yes, the copious imagination that is *Sine Qua Non*, essential, to all creativity – to things not having had any prior existence until you reach into that vast contagious pool of supposition and begin imagining.

And much, much later, after surrendering myself into the dubious embrace of the ever-changing creative world, I began to add to my tutelage, a tutelage that can never teach experience, however. Yes, no tutelage can ever teach experience because no such thing exists. But it can properly *prepare* you for it in many ways, arming you with potential. And what is potential? It is that which exists in possibility. Howard did this for me and I took full advantage of opening doors and peering into rooms I never knew existed as my temporary eyes and ears symbolically held my inquisitive hand.

In the meantime, I found that success often involves more than intellect and talent. The other element in the equation for success necessitates a knock on your door with someone on the other side requesting the product of whatever talent you have made known by having developed it through the invaluable element of experience. We call this *opportunity!* If nobody ever knocks,

even if you are the greatest, no one will ever hear you. Thus, all aspirations and, dreams would then become academic – a moot point. I was one of the fortunate ones because I got many meaningful knocks that propelled me forward with great thrust, and made me recognizable internationally. Am I bragging here? Absolutely not! Putting it simply, that's the way it was and it remains something I could never brag about because of my heartfelt appreciation and knowing that it could have turned out another way.

Time, that inveterate “Tattle-tale,” tells everything, and it was no different in my case as it unashamedly disrobed revealing all, which fortunately included me. I was humbled by this and continue joyfully sharing vestiges of myself, not as a ‘show off,’ but as one fully enjoying that which is being ambitiously pursued until this very day. It's still glorious even after the elapsing of so much time, and after leaving behind so many memorable events and occasions that threw me in among iconic luminaries, the memory of which has taken up residence in my past along with myriad things that all began as *unimaginable* and *not possible*.

And yet with all of this zeal and gusto, we intuitively realize that when a bell is rung it can never be un-rung, never called back and out of existence, which necessitates accuracy in acquiring that much sought-after knowledge.

Moving ahead included receiving a few unexpected but much appreciated Honorary Doctorates from varying colleges and universities. But as they came, I had an aching feeling for the one that would mean everything to me – one from my Alma Mater, Howard University. As my chronology began tapping me on my shoulder, I began thinking, “This is one of those unfulfilled dreams that will never happen,” like The Hulk, Superman, and Captain Marvel.

But lo and behold, one day Fred Irby,III, Professor and Director of the Jazz Ensemble, called me ... *and that was it!* I was informed that I would become the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate. I immediately began mentally soaring above the circle of the earth in unoccupied airspace. It was fantasy at its best and simultaneously a joyous oxymoronic reality. I felt my life was now complete, even if I was dismissed from the element of time. This was the emergence of a dream deferred. That is, until it chose to present itself with 3 dimensional characteristics of unchallenged and believable realism. Dreams do come true. *Hi yo, Silver!* It's been a long way from my comic book confidential days until this moment ... but the wait was magnificent.

Yes, sometime even the most obscure but meaningful dreams manage to find their way onto the stage of reality. Howard University has long since become a much-appreciated and important part of my life forever.

Howard University, how I passionately love you.

*Benny Golson, New York City, October 3*