

Where Are They Now?

They honed their musical skills at Howard, and traveled the road to a successful career, winning awards and gaining acclaim along the way. So where are they now?

Roberta Flack

(B.Mus.Ed. '58)



owned the airwaves in the 1970s. There were few R&B and pop radio stations during that decade that weren't playing one of her soulful and jazzy melodies. She was the first artist to win a Grammy Award for Record of the Year two consecutive times ("The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" in 1973 and "Killing Me Softly With His Song" in 1974), while duets with her former Howard classmate Donny Hathaway—"Where is the Love," "The Closer I Get to You," "You Are My Heaven" and "Back Together Again"—are legendary. She continued her hit making well into the 1980s, with "Making Love" and a duet with Peabo Bryson, "Tonight I Celebrate My Love."

She credits Howard with helping to develop her golden musical pipes. "My time at Howard helped to shape who I am today as an artist," says Flack, 75, who received a music scholarship at age 15 to attend the University. "The professors and instructors helped me to open my mind and heart to the possibilities and opportunities in the world. I am forever grateful and proud to be an alumna."

Four Grammy Awards and one American Music Award later (and don't forget the star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame), Flack continues to perform around the world (in the United Kingdom in April and May of this year, and in Japan in December of last year). In 2012, she released *Let it Be Roberta*, a CD of Beatles tunes. She recently was a featured guest on a Japanese album project (Ken Hirai), and in between performing is considering new collaborations.

"I'm working with some very talented young musicians in my project, The Real Artist's Symposium," she says. "And an exciting discovery of a large collection of live concert recordings, not heard for over 30-plus years, in my archives has had me working with my management to release these great songs that span my career."

—Raven Padgett

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Eric Roberson

(B.F.A. '97)

has soared to great heights with two Grammy nominations and countless other accolades, including a 2009 Soul Train Award nomination. Yet he still reminisces about the moments he spent at his *alma mater*, where he matured not only as an artist, but also as an individual.

"I remember sitting on the front steps of the Fine Arts building with other musicians or sitting at the guitar with friends. You know, just talking, enjoying the beautiful weather and seeing the amazing people walking by."

Roberson came to Howard on scholarship from Rahway, N.J., majoring in musical theater. He was enchanted by Howard's musical legacy and remembers picking the brain of an English professor who taught Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway. Being a true music lover, Roberson always seemed to find himself in the studio with friends from Howard, including the late Raymond "Scotty Beats" Brown II, when he was not doing a play.

"A lot of us used to record at a studio called Night Flight. We would work the midnight shifts so we could do sessions at two o'clock in the morning when nobody was using it. I still get my records mixed at Night Flight [to] this day," Roberson says.

When Roberson was a sophomore, he was offered a record deal from Warner Bros. His 1994 single "The Moon" was successful, but according to Roberson it "dried out" quickly. After taking a yearlong break from college, he found himself back in the arms of Howard University.

"I think a lot of what people see today is more of that artist that returned to Howard," Roberson says. "I feel like I became a man at Howard. And the work ethic that you build on at Howard, whether it's doing right by your classmates and doing right by your teachers, it will help you down the road."

Through the years, Roberson has experienced much success in the music industry, even starting his own label, Blue Erro Soul, in 2001. His unique neo-soul sound has garnered a large fan base and much acclaim. Yet his admiration for his *alma mater* is apparent and as fresh as it was before he even became a Bison.

"When you graduate, you'll see how many people from Howard are strong movers and shakers in the music business. It's really amazing," he says.

Roberson's upcoming album, *Musical Monologues*, is slated to be released later this year.

—Megan Sims



"The work ethic that you build on at Howard ... will help you down the road."

Harold Wheeler

(Mus.B. '64)

started as a piano major at Howard before moving to New York City for graduate school. While in New York, he auditioned for composers Burt Bacharach and Hal David, who loved his performance. At 25, he became the youngest and the first Black conductor for a Broadway musical (*Promises, Promises*). Since then, he has

been nominated six times for a Tony Award and won the Drama Desk Award for *Hairspray* for Best Orchestrations.

Wheeler is most recently known for his work on *Dancing with the Stars*, where he just completed 17 seasons as the show's musical director. He is currently working on the revival of the Broadway show *Side*

Show. Wheeler plans to bring the show on the road, starting in Washington, D.C., through the summer of 2014 before heading back to Broadway. Wheeler, 70, has enjoyed a career that has thrived over five decades and says, "I'll be around as long as the industry needs me."

—Jean-Louis Ntang Beb

"I'll be around as long as the industry needs me."





Benny Golson

carries with him the same fervor that brought the renowned composer, arranger, lyricist, producer and tenor saxophonist from Philadelphia to Howard as a music education major.

When Golson arrived in the fall of 1947, he recalls there were no jazz music classes, so he and his fellow classmates began to play together for no credit in the school jazz band. He also performed with the Howard Swing Masters and wrote music with them.

“We used to play at the old arts building whenever we had to play on campus, which was usually at night and on weekends,” he says.

Golson left Howard after three years to pursue his passion and received his first opportunity in 1951 with the R&B group Bullmoose Jackson and His Buffalo Bearcats.

“I was anxious to get started in my career,” Golson says.

Since his first big break, he has played with Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Goodman and Lionel Hampton, among other prominent musicians.

“I knew about all those bands long before I played with them. And I never knew that I would be good enough to be playing with the likes of those guys. So each one of those bands I joined was like an adventure, a dream being fulfilled,” he says.

“Howard helped shape my career. It gave me a broader outlook on life and how I would fit into things.”

Golson has also composed music for musicians like Count Basie, Miles Davis and Ella Fitzgerald, and recorded scores for television shows like *M*A*S*H* and the Academy Awards and the movie *Mission Impossible*. Yet with all of his success, he has never forgotten about his time at Howard and how it helped contribute to his success. During this year’s Commencement ceremony, he returned to his *alma mater* to receive an honorary doctorate degree in the arts.

“Howard helped shape my career. It gave me a broader outlook on life and how I would fit into things,” says Golson, who continues to tour and compose both jazz and classical pieces. “Sometimes we think we know more than we do. But I have found that the greatest hindrance to knowledge is thinking you already have it.”

—Megan Sims