



JAZZ PENSACOLA

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Yusef Lateef, An American Jazz Master

by Carolyn Tokson

Since it's Black history month, I thought I'd highlight a Black jazz musician whose name is not as well known as so many other American jazz heroes. Yusef Lateef was a multi-talented jazz musician, novelist, businessman, composer and artist. He played the tenor sax and flute principally but also the oboe and bassoon as well as non-western instruments. Dr. Lateef taught at the the University of Massachusetts and several other colleges and is credited with a long period of innovation and experimentation with his inclusion of Eastern sounds and fusion of genres in his recordings and compositions.

When I first joined the jazz society here, I had indeed heard much of the jazz influenced by North African sounds when I had lived in Europe and travelled in Paris or along the Mediterranean. But I did not know Lateef specifically. I was a fan of trumpeter Ibrahim Maalouf, a native of Beirut, and beloved of French jazz fans, whose music is very much influenced by his Middle Eastern roots. My admiration for Lateef came as a result of an elegant event sponsored by Jazz Pensacola at the Pensacola Museum of Art. Dr. Norman Vickers had collaborated with the museum to have an exhibit of the black and white photography of Duncan Scheidt whose book *Jazz in Black and White* had come out in 2004. The late Al Martin entertained us with his music and there was a catered buffet. Toward the end of the event, Mr. Scheidt even played a few jazz pieces on the piano. It was indeed an evening to remember.

For me, as I walked around the gallery, one photograph kept pulling me back, Lateef's. His eyes had such a peaceful haunting quality that I felt pulled into them. That began my fascination with this very special human being.

At an early age, Lateef, whose earlier name was William Emanuel Huddleston, came under the influence of a variety of Detroit jazz greats. By young adulthood, he was a fine saxophonist and worked with swing bands. After a tour with Dizzy Gillespie, Lateef entered Wayne State University to study composition and flute. His conversion to the Ahmadiyah Community of Islam influenced his music. Until the 1950's, the community was the most prevalent form of Islam in African-American life and is considered by many as an early influence in the Civil Rights Movement. Other well known jazz musicians who became part of the Community were pianist, Ahmad Jamal; vocalist, Dakota Staton; trumpeter, Talib Dawud, and drummer, Art Blakey. John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* was influenced by the Ahmadiyah Community as well.

While reading the Qu'ran, Lateef developed his fascination with non-western music and studied oboe with the first oboist of the Detroit Symphony encouraging the use of the instrument in jazz. He continued to study flute at the Manhattan School of Music and taught what he termed "autopsychic" music in NY City. Later studies at the University of Massachusetts in education led to a long teaching career there. At one point he studied flute in Nigeria with the Fulani people.

In 1987, he won a Grammy for best new-age recording. The National Endowment for the Humanities made him an American Jazz Master in 2010. He also wrote two novellas and short stories. He painted as well. He is remembered by other musicians, like drummer and composer Adam

Rudolph, as having been always open-minded and eager to try something new and eager to develop new processes.

His discography is impressive. He played with Charlie Mingus, Cannonball Adderley, Miles Davis, Barry Harris and many more fine jazz musicians. He also led his own groups. Thanks to Steve Douglas for the following list.

Every Village has a Song...2 disc set of formative material on various labels...'49-'76

Morning '57 on Savoy

Other Sounds '57

Yusef Lateef '57-'61 2 LP set from 3 different LP's on Prestige and New Jazz

The Dreamer '59

The Fabric of Jazz '59

Cry/Tender '59

The Three Faces of Yusef Lateef '60

Eastern Sounds '61

Into Something '61

Re-Evaluations: The Impulse Years '63-'66

Live at Pep's '64

1984 '64

The Golden Flute '66

The Diverse Yusef Lateef/Suite 16 CD of 2 complete LP's from Atlantic

The Gentle Giant.....overlooked date with Kenny Barron '74

Tenors of Yusef and Von Freeman '92

Tenors of Yusef Lateef and Ricky Ford '94

For more information go to <https://yuseflateef.com> or look for videos on YouTube.