

World-renowned Pianist and NEA Jazz Master Randy Weston Dies at 92

April 6, 1926 – September 1, 2018

NEW YORK, NY, September 1, 2018 – Randy Weston, NEA Jazz Master, Doris Duke Impact Award recipient, United States Artist Fellow and Guggenheim Foundation Fellow has died. The legendary pianist transitioned peacefully at his home today, announced his wife and business partner Fatoumata Weston. He was 92.

Weston has been laying down his distinctive rhythms since his first CD, *Cole Porter in a Modern Mood*, in 1954 right up to *The African Nubian Suite*, released in 2016. Throughout his prolific 65-year recording career, Weston drew connections between the jazz and blues that surrounded him while growing up in Brooklyn and the music of Africa, his ancestral homeland.

The pianist's long-time attorney Gail Boyd, said, "I spoke with Randy and Fatou just yesterday afternoon, and he seemed the picture of health as we discussed plans for travel and performances across the US, the Caribbean and Africa. His sudden death is another reminder that we all need to live life to the fullest, and Randy did just that, bringing love and joy to his family, friends and fans."

Randy Weston was born in Brooklyn, New York, on April 6, 1926, to a Panamanian father and a mother originally from Virginia. Unlike many African Americans of his generation who acknowledged little connection between themselves and the mother continent, Weston proudly proclaimed himself an African from an early age, thanks largely to the influence of his father, Frank Edward Weston.

"I was always reading and imagining what it was like in Africa before it was invaded. You had African empires—Egypt, Nubia, Songhai empire of Mali, Ghana—and the magnificent architecture and the music. It's mind-blowing. You don't hear about it in school. You don't see it in the movies, but I've been blessed to live on the continent. I've been to 18 countries on the continent. I always look for the oldest people I can find. I want to hear the oldest music I can listen to. We did that growing up in Brooklyn. As kids, we always did that with the old people. They would tell us all these stories."

Weston took classical piano lessons as a child and enjoyed jazz keyboard greats Count Basie, Nat "King" Cole, Art Tatum, and especially Duke Ellington. After serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, he returned home and went to work in his father's Caribbean-style restaurant, Trios, which became a frequent hangout for Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie, Ella Fitzgerald and Igor Stravinsky, among others.

Coleman Hawkins was Weston's tenor saxophone hero. Hawkins later introduced Weston to then little-known pianist Thelonious Monk, who became Weston's friend, mentor, and major influence, just as Weston later became to many other musicians.

Africa became the theme of numerous future Weston albums, many with arrangements by Melba Liston. They include **Uhuru Africa** (1960), **Highlife** (1963), **African Cookbook** (1969), and **Blue Moses** (1972). He first visited Africa in 1961 and then again in 1963 as a part of The American Society of African Culture. He traveled throughout the continent in 1967 for the U.S State Department and settled in Tangiers, Morocco, where he remained for five years and operated a venue called the African Rhythms Club.

The African Nubian Suite, Weston's 50th album and first to be issued on his own African Rhythms label, was the most magnificent manifestation Weston's life-long quest. Recorded in concert on Easter Sunday 2012 at New York University's Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, the two-CD set lays out the history of the human race in music and words. He and narrator Wayne Chandler trace it back to Ardi, a woman who walked upright 4.4 million years ago in Nubia, a region along the Nile River that straddles parts of what are today Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia.

Weston held honorary Doctor of Music degrees from Colby College, Brooklyn College, and the New England Conservatory of Music. He served as artist-in-residence at New York University, the New School and Medgar Evers College at the City University of New York. In 2010, Duke University Press published **African Rhythms: The Autobiography of Randy Weston**, written by Weston and arranged by Willard Jenkins. He was honored by King Mohammed VI of Morocco and was presented the Legacy Award by the Institute of the Black World. His decades of work are now archived at Harvard University.

The gentle giant (he was 6'7") continued to reside in his beloved Brooklyn with Fatoumata, his wife of --- years. He had four children, Cheryl, Pamela, Azzedin (deceased) and Kim; seven grandchildren; six great grandchildren; and one great-great grandchild.

Arrangements are forthcoming and will be announced soon.

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