



By Tia Powell Harris

Louis Johnson, born on March 19, 1931 in Statesville, N.C., grew up and spent most of his childhood in Washington D.C. After initial study at the Doris Jones-Clara Haywood School of Dance he moved to New York in 1950 to accept a scholarship at the School of American Ballet.

His two most popular ballets are *Forces of Rhythm* (1972), created for the Dance Theatre of Harlem, and *Fontessa and Friends* (1981), first performed by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. In 1970 Johnson was nominated for a Tony Award for his choreography of *Purlie*. He also choreographed the films *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) and *The Wiz* (1978).

Together, Louis Johnson and Mike Malone cultivated a platform that launched dancers to globetrotting careers, from New York to London and other stages near and far. Blazing success from the DC Black Repertory Dance Company prompted Malone and Johnson to continue stamping their unique signatures on the world of dance education and performance.

In 1974, Malone co-founded the first arts high school in Washington, DC, the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. However, Johnson “eased on down the road” to choreograph *The Wiz* and establish the *Louis Johnson Dance Company*.

“I consider Louis to be one of the most creative artists of our time,” says Charles Augins, chair of Ellington’s Dance Department. “He was my mentor and lifelong friend. He was a major contributor to this school and especially the Dance Department.”



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Renowned trumpeter/composer and Ellington alum **Wallace Roney** passed away on March 31, 2020 due to complications of the coronavirus.

He was a superb bandleader who mixed post-bop sensibilities with funk, fusion, and free jazz. When he entered the Ellington School, he had already made his recording debut at age 14 and had attained distinction as a gifted local performer.

While at Ellington he studied the trumpet with Langston Fitzgerald, who taught him to strive for excellence in spite of obstacles. Reginald Cyntje, Ellington's Director of Jazz Studies, shared his sentiments upon learning of Roney's passing.

"Wallace Roney represents the upper echelon of musicians who attended Duke Ellington School of the Arts and later Howard University," Cyntje says. "Throughout the history of jazz, the elders would select the next musician in line. Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, and Tony Williams chose Wallace Roney to be the next great jazz trumpeter."

Roney is the recipient of three Grammy Awards and holds the distinction of being the only trumpet player to ever be personally mentored by Miles Davis.



By Marta Reid Stewart

Dr. David C. Driskell, the world's premier authority on African American Art in the United States transitioned on April 1, 2020. He was not only a brilliant scholar/curator, accomplished artist, and prolific collector, but also a magnanimous human being and a good person.

Driskell gave of himself in subtle, yet impactful, ways. He inspired scores of budding artists and art historians to care enough, be curious enough, and be determined enough to research, document and exhibit the often-evocative African American experience.

I will never forget the energy around the release of Driskell's canonic monograph, "Two Centuries of Black American Art 1750-1955," with the accompanying eponymous exhibition which hit the scene in 1975. As guest professor at Howard University, he nurtured his students on many levels; I was fortunate to be in his class. Reading his book taught me the importance of documentation and having a voice that controls or influences the interpretation of a narrative.

One takeaway of his groundbreaking book was the rejection of Thomas Jefferson's notion that Black people "were not creative, intelligent or talented enough to do much more beyond the menial work they were told to do, because he had not seen much evidence of such." Driskell's book proved that African American artists have made significant contributions to American art.

Dr. Driskell's munificence extended to invaluable philanthropy. Through his charitable foundation, he was responsible for donating tens of thousands of dollars to ensure that Ellington School students had vital equipment. His generosity led to updated computers for our students, some of whom will be major contributors to art, culture and the museum profession. Our challenge now is to continue his legacy.

— *Marta Reid Stewart is the founding chair of Ellington's Museum Studies Department.*