

JON HENDRICKS BIOGRAPHY

JON HENDRICKS, Singer, Lyricist and Drummer, was born September 16, 1921, in Newark, Ohio, the ninth child and seventh son of Reverend and Sister Willie Carrington Hendricks, of the African-American Episcopal Church. Little Johnnie, as he was called, began singing alongside his Mother at the age of six. By the age of nine he was singing secular songs around Toledo, Ohio and bringing home money, which helped, feed the family of seventeen during the Great Depression that hit in 1929. Toledo being one of the main "Switch Towns" at that time, trains coming from New York en route West stopped in Toledo to switch engines. Passengers being allowed to detrain and hang around for as long as they liked, continuing their journey at their whim, Toledo was a pretty live town in those days; somewhat like Kansas City under the Pendergast machine and the hippest and most active club was in what was then Toledo's ghetto and was called The Waiters and Bellmen's Club. One of the neighbors and friends of the Hendricks family were the Tatums, one of whose sons, Arthur, played the piano. Although he was nearly totally blind, Art, as he was called, got Little Johnny the job as Vocalist in the shows at the Waiter's and Bellmen's Club. Since Little Johnny was only 13 at the time, he had to spend time in between shows downstairs. Since every Jazz singer or musician came through Toledo at one time or another, Little Johnny Hendricks had, by the time he was 14, met them all; Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, Jimmy Lunceford, Fats Waller, Claude Hopkins, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Nathaniel Cole (not yet become "King") and still a non-singing Jazz pianist, Jay McShann with young Charlie Parker, plus the ever-popular "Many Others."

World War II interrupted this invaluable Jazz Education program and Hendricks entered the United States Army in 1942, serving 3 years and four months in The European Theater of Operations. On the Victory ship bringing him home he heard a recording, "Salt Peanuts," by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. The first thing he did on disembarking is to buy as many Be-bop records as he could find, because he had heard the music that he wanted to sing the rest of his life.

He found gigs immediately and began working steadily around Northwestern Ohio and Southern Michigan. Meanwhile, he enrolled in the University of Toledo under the G.I. Bill in the Pre-Law School. During this time Charlie Parker and his Quintet came through Toledo and someone suggested to Bird that he let Jon Hendricks sit in and Bird agreed. Bird (Charlie Parker) suggested to Hendricks that he come to New York and when Jon told him, "I don't know nobody in New York," Bird replied, "You know me." Jon asked, "Where will I find you?" He replied without a second's hesitation, "Just ask anybody." Incredulously, Hendricks fairly flew off the bandstand. Two years and four months later, when he did come to New York and walked into The Apollo Bar, where Bird was then appearing, Bird, in the middle of a solo as Hendricks passed

the bandstand, said, "Hey, Jon! How Y'doin', Man? You wanna' sing some?" Hendricks, completely in shock at this man's extraordinary memory, held on to the wall to keep his knees from buckling, then followed a waitress to a table and collapsed into a chair. The experience had definitely shut his mouth wide open! Getting his breath back and recovering, somewhat, he checked the group out. Gerry Mulligan was on baritone saxophone with his thick shock of blood-red hair, raggedy once-blue jeans and tennis shoes, no sox and playin' pure-D Be-bop like a demon! Bud Powell was on piano, inspiring the whole wide world. Curley Russell, Bird's buddy from Jay McShann and the K.C. days, was on bass and The Little Giant, Roy Haines, was on drums.

After intermission, Bird called me up to sing. "Naw, Bird," yelled drummer, Roy Haines, "this is our last set. We don't want no singers, Man, we wanna' PLAY". Hendricks says, "I thought I was going to die from embarrassment, but Bird cooled Roy out and presented me". After that night I knew everything was going to be cool because Bird was my PR Man, and I started giggin' almost immediately all around the City."

Not long after that, Hendricks heard "Moody's Mood for Love" by King Pleasure And immediately recognized new possibilities for telling whole stories in parabolic poetry using great established Jazz big-band instrumentals, which he immediately began by lyricizing "Four Brothers," the Jimmy Guiffre composition for Woody Herman's Third Herd. This led to a recording with singers organized by Dave Lambert, Bird's favorite Be-bop singer. A partnership began that lasted into the formation of Lambert, Hendricks and Ross, the Number One Jazz Vocal Group in the world for the five years they were together. They introduced what Jazz Critic, Leonard Feather, dubbed "Vocalese," which changed Jazz singing throughout the world.

Lambert, Hendricks and Ross inspired every Jazz Vocal group worldwide, including the Double Six of Paris, of which both Annie Ross and Blossom Dearie were once members, The Swingle Singers, The New York Voices and The Manhattan Transfer, for whom Hendricks wrote an album titled "Vocalese." This album was a stellar success, winning a total of seven Grammys, including one for Jon Hendricks and Bobby McFerrin, guests on the album. Bobby had sung with Jon Hendricks & Company in 1980.

Lambert, Hendricks & Ross won the first ever Grammy in the Jazz Vocal Group category. Not only were they Number One in the world for the entire five years they were together, but the French just eliminated the Jazz Vocal Group category and automatically awarded it to LH&R every year!

Jon Hendricks was on the Artists' Board of the Committee for the Kennedy Center Honors, during which time he met and shook hands with three Presidents of The United States. On December 18, 1992, he received a letter from then-President George Herbert Walker Bush congratulating him on being awarded the

American Jazz Masters Fellowship Award, the prestigious honor that our Nation bestows on a Jazz Musician.

During the time he and his family lived in England, he was voted Number One Jazz Singer in the World by Melody Maker two years running, Ray Charles Second and Frank Sinatra Third. Pre-eminent Jazz critic, Leonard Feather, dubbed Hendricks "The Poet-Laureate of Jazz." Time magazine referred to him as "The James Joyce of Jive." Singer Carmen McCrae dubbed him The Greatest Lyricist in the World. Peter O'toole called him "Superb." Theolonious Monk said, "He's the only one I want to lyricise my music." Hendricks was personally chosen by Duke Ellington to be the featured vocalist in the first production of his Sacred Concert at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. When Hendricks asked him, "Why Me?" He replied, "Too many people sing about God without authority. I want someone to sing about God with authority."

Hendricks is also the winner of the Emmy, the Iris and the prestigious Peabody award for his CBS documentary, "Somewhere To Lay My Weary Head," in which he both starred in and narrated.

During his sojourn abroad, Hendricks also wrote the lyrics for songs in a film featuring Georgie Fame and a 17-year old young lady from Australia, Olivia Newton-John, as well as lyrics for Annie Ross's song in a Marlon Brando film, "The Night of the following Day".

Hendricks began his academic career teaching at UCLA at Sonoma, Stanford University, UC Berkeley and is still at it, teaching a course of his own design, "Jazz in American Society" at his Alma Mater, the University of Toledo, where his class is in its tenth year and still Number One on Campus, as it has always been.

Not content to rest on his laurels, Hendricks has now launched a successor to his world famous group, Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, called LH&R Redux, pronounced "Redo," from the French, "reducere," to "bring back," which is exactly what Hendricks is doing. This past fall a European tour to London and Paris, in which the group played to sold out houses, was a brilliant success.

A new CD, "Sing Another Song of Basie" is now in preparation, as well as worldwide tours to introduce the group to a new generation. Awards and honors received by Mr. Hendricks during his many years include receiving the prestigious Legion of Honor, the highest Civilian award the French government offers, and the status of Residency in Britain.

Two new documentaries on his life from Germany and France are now being shown around Europe and the U.S. and are soon to be seen on PBS.

It was Dr. Hendricks who was called away from the University of Toledo to

The Sorbonne in Paris to lecture and perform at the opening of their Jazz Program with his Vocalstra, a 16 voice vocal orchestra singing American Jazz Standards in Vocalese, the world's newest cultural art form, invented by Dr. Hendricks for Lambert Hendricks and Ross.

Receiving the Legion D'honneur earned Dr. Hendricks five full pages in the celebrated French newspaper, Le Monde, which is understandable when one realizes that it was not in the United States that the first serious writing on Jazz was done, but in France.