

unity



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Maria Howell: Star light, star bright



Since her appearance as a soloist in 1985's "The Color Purple," Maria Howell has further expanded into acting and voiceover work. Photo by April Freidline

Success, notes the gifted and versatile Maria Howell, has nothing to do with flukes. Instead, says the immensely talented singer, actress and voiceover artist, it's more about pluck.

"I don't believe in luck because I'm one of those faith people. ...," says Howell in an interview with *Unity* magazine. "Success is not (about luck). It's all about what are you here to do and are you doing that?"

"The biggest thing I like people to know is that it's never too late to start anything. I'm a firm believer in that."

Howell has been immersed in her calling as a performer since childhood. That's thanks to her mother, Virginia, a trumpet player and amateur singer "with a beautiful voice." They sang in their church choir together. Primarily because of her mother's tutelage, Howell's college peers and professors assumed she was a music major. A native of Gastonia, North Carolina, near Charlotte, Howell actually majored in biology at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina.

After years of singing engagements, Howell made her film debut as a soloist in the Oscar-nominated "The Color Purple," where she sang "God Is Tryin' to Tell You Something" as part of – wouldn't you know it? – a church choir.

Since then, she has sung in venues all over Asia, Europe and North America. In fact, she sang in Japan for six years while married to her then-husband, who was stationed there as a Marine. "That launched a whole new part of my career that was great," Howell recalls, including concerts, jazz group performances and commercials. And singing (plus classes in theatrical arts) made a nice segue into another area of entertainment: acting. She's played numerous characters, including attorney Ida Hayes in "Devious Maids" and scientist Grace Beaumont in the sci-fi thriller "Revolution." Howell says "Revolution" was one of the most challenging shows in which she's performed "because it was the first one that I really had to get the logistics of it all, the movement of it all."



There will be plenty of opportunities to see Howell, who resides in California and North Carolina, on screen in 2020. The film "Bygone Billy," about a troubled ex-cop working to rebuild his marriage, is scheduled to debut this year. There's also "Bewildered," a short film chronicling the love and challenges that Howell's character, Sara Honore, and her husband, Joseph, played by Keith David, share.

And you can hear Howell live and on recordings. Her most recent release is "Straighten Up and Fly Right (Live)," a duet with pianist / arranger Noel Freidline. Live performances in 2020 include shows in Charlotte.

To learn more about Maria Howell and her ever-expanding repertoire, visit mariahowell.com and follow her on Instagram and Twitter (@MariaSingsActs) and Facebook (@mariahowellfanpage).

Passionate protector of American history



Lonnie G. Bunch III is the first African-American secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Photo by Michael Barnes / Smithsonian Institution

In June 2019, Lonnie G. Bunch III – a longtime historian – made history himself. He was named the Smithsonian’s secretary, in charge of 19 museums, 21 libraries, the National Zoo, numerous research centers and thousands of employees. Bunch, who grew up in Belleville, New Jersey – where his family was the only black one in their neighborhood – is the first African-American secretary of the Smithsonian.

“For me, history was both a way to understand the American past, but also a way to help me understand why some people treated me wonderfully and some people did not,” Bunch said during a 2019 interview on CBS’ “Sunday Morning” TV show.

The Smithsonian Institution is the world’s largest museum, education and research complex. Bunch, the 14th secretary of the Smithsonian, is the previous (and first) director of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African-American History and

Culture. When he started there as director in July 2005, he had one staff member, no collections, no funding and no site for a museum.

Before his appointment as director of the African-American museum in D.C., Bunch was the president of the Chicago Historical Society for four years. There, he managed an institutional reorganization, initiated an outreach initiative to diverse communities and launched a much-lauded exhibition and program on teenagers titled “Teen Chicago.”

Prior to his stint in Chicago, Bunch worked at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History from 1989 to 2000. He held positions including associate director for curatorial affairs. During that time, he developed the “Smithsonian’s America” exhibit for the American Festival Japan 1994, which was presented in Japan. He also worked at the Air & Space Museum in the late 1970s.



Lonnie Bunch shows off the ceremonial key to the Smithsonian Castle. Photo by Jaclyn Nash

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Moving depictions of heritage and hope

Although their work is distinctly different, each artist featured in this issue of *Unity* captures the essence of African-American culture in his or her work.

Harold D. Davis

Raised on a farm in rural South Carolina until age 7, Harold Davis lived with his parents and extended family. When not doing chores as a child, he sketched on paper with charcoal from the fireplace and drew with pencils, chalk and crayons. After moving to Bridgeport, Connecticut, Davis says his neighbor, an artist, taught him to draw and use oils on canvas. Upon graduating from high school, he attended Traphagan School of Fashion and Design in New York and spent a year abroad studying art and sculpture in Paris.



"Birds" by Harold D. Davis

"My abstract expressionist paintings emphasize the strength of free form," Davis explains. His work incorporates images and shadows to create different visions and emotions for the viewer.



"Facial Impression"
by Harold D. Davis

"Birds," an acrylic painting on canvas, shows the winged creatures flying to their nests after fishing offshore. The clouds in the painting are a mixture of cascading reds and yellows.

"Facial Impression" is a mixed-media painting, using three textures to create a basket-weave effect on a man's face.

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"Nomad" by Harold D. Davis

One must look carefully at "Nomad" to find an abstract depiction of a warrior riding on an elephant while holding a spear. The reds symbolize the shedding of blood and the flames surrounding him.

Many of Davis' artworks have been exhibited in universities, libraries and theaters. Numerous paintings can be found in private collections throughout the U.S. and France.

Monique Luck

Monique Luck was born in the Los Angeles, California, area and comes from a long line of performing and visual artists; her mother, a dancer; father, a musician; grandmother, an opera singer; and grandfather, a poet. Luck says several of her pieces are directly inspired by her grandfather's poetry and storytelling, and lines of his poetry have become titles of some of her work.



"Evocation" by Monique Luck

Luck's work uses fragments of found paper with unique textures and patterns. "I fell in love with collage when I taught a class of elementary students," Luck says. "I loved it so much that I incorporated it from that point on." Her work in this publication is part of the Evocation Project, which showcases personal stories and memories gathered during dialogues with the community. She says it was created from an emotional experience resulting from a personal loss.



"I Always Wanted to Be Lost in Your Smile, In your Grace" by Monique Luck

Her piece titled "Evocation" is about recalling beautiful moments and memories. It was the first piece in response to her personal loss and the beginning of the project.

"I Always Wanted to Be Lost in Your Smile, In your Grace" and "I'll Line the Pieces Up, Yours and Mine" are quotes from anonymous community members in response to their personal losses. The note in "I'll Line the Pieces up..." is part of the finished piece. "In these pieces, I used various shades of blue because of my love of water and the emotions that water evoke in me," she says.

Luck has exhibited in galleries across the United States as well as Berlin, Germany. She has a permanent public art installation at the Renaissance West Community Initiative in Charlotte, North Carolina, and her work can be found at the African-American Museum of Dallas' permanent collection.



"I'll Line the Pieces Up, Yours and Mine" by Monique Luck

Patricia Bohannon

Born on the south side of Chicago, Illinois, Patricia Bohannon was raised by a single parent in a tenement along with her sister. Bohannon says it was not until grade school that she realized she had a "God-given gift." Art was all around her, especially in high school. Bohannon credits a sculptor and ceramic



"Ode to John Wesley Gilbert" by Patricia Bohannon

artist in college for bringing forth her artistic skills. She graduated from Chicago State University with honors as an art major and earned a bachelor's degree in secondary education.

The three images selected for this publication are from Bohannon's Visual Odes series. Visual Odes recognizes

the contributions "and sometimes victimization of unsung heroes," Bohannon declares. "Some are only known regionally while others have more notoriety and impact."

Through the creative process, Bohannon uses symbols and written descriptions to illuminate her unsung heroes' stories. "Ode to John Wesley Gilbert," featuring a fair-skinned African-American man, is made of fiber clay with acrylic paints of faux bronze and various shades of blue in the background. Gilbert, born into slavery, was the first African-American to receive a master's degree from Brown University, and the first graduate and professor at Paine College in Augusta, Georgia.



"Ode to the Aboriginal American" by Patricia Bohannon

The abstract fused glasswork, "Ode to the Aboriginal American," is Bohannon's interpretation of Native Americans "who," Bohannon states, "survived and were enslaved and reclassified as African."

Bohannon's "Ode to Hosea Williams: 'Unbought and Unbossed'" is her depiction of Williams, the civil rights leader who served with the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. The blue overalls and red shirt were said to be Williams' trademark and favorite attire.



"Ode to Hosea Williams: 'Unbought and Unbossed'" by Patricia Bohannon

Bohannon is known for her rich color pallet to create abstract and representational works in multiple genres. Collectors include NASA astronaut Mae C. Jamison and Dave Winfield, a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Dishes with a decidedly Nigerian accent

Nigeria – triple the size of Italy – has a plethora of regional cuisines. The food in the north is influenced by a preponderance of cattle and other livestock. Meanwhile, the coast is where dishes featuring fresh fish are prevalent. And in the south, red palm oil is a signature ingredient in just about everything. Following are three of the dishes that epitomize the country's collective palate.

Jollof rice

A batch of jollof rice consists of a few essentials: a sauce of obe ata (the tomato-pepper base found in several dishes), herbs, spices and meat stock, and a precise ratio of sauce to rice, so the cooked grains remain separate.



Efo riro (African stewed spinach)

Recipe writer Yewande Komolafe (who grew up in Lagos) explained the intricacies of this dish in her 2019 article for *The New York Times*:

“Every region of Nigeria has a version of stewed greens, in which the greens are paired with intensely flavorful pantry items to create a complex dish. Efo riro is a version particular to the Yorubas and can be found on menus and in kitchens all around Lagos and the southwestern part of the country.

“Amaranth greens (called tete in Yoruba, and known as callaloo across the Caribbean and in the United States) are the greens of choice for efo riro. Obe ata is the base sauce, and red palm kernel oil adds richness, but umami-rich staples like fermented locust beans, dried crayfish and smoked fish or chunks of air-dried cod steal the show.”

Puff puff

Nigeria's version of a doughnut is a street food in the category known as “small chops”: appetizers that can be consumed in one or two bites. You can find versions that are plain or tossed in sugar, maybe with a dipping sauce, or stuffed with sweet or savory fillings on restaurant menus in Lagos.

JOLLOF RICE

Recipe courtesy of www.allrecipes.com

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 2 (14 1/2-ounce) cans stewed tomatoes
- 1/2 (6 ounce) can tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon fresh rosemary, chopped
- 2 cups water
- 1 (3-pound) whole chicken, cut into 8 pieces
- 1 cup uncooked white rice
- 1 cup carrots, diced
- 1/2 pound fresh green beans, trimmed and snapped into 1- to 2-inch pieces
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

Pour the oil into a large saucepan. Cook the onion in the oil over medium-low heat until translucent.

Stir in the stewed tomatoes and tomato paste, and season with the salt, black pepper, cayenne pepper, red pepper flakes, Worcestershire sauce and rosemary. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, stir in the water and then add the chicken pieces. Simmer for 30 minutes. Stir in the rice, carrots and green beans, and season with the nutmeg. Bring to a boil, and then reduce the heat to low. Cover and simmer until the chicken is fork-tender and the rice is cooked, 25 to 30 minutes.

History chronicled in the pages of cookbooks

The David Walker Lupton African-American Cookbook Collection at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa is a fitting testament to anyone who's ever prepared a fine soul-food meal, and a special treat for the people lucky enough to consume such a repast.

The collection – consisting of nearly 500 cookbooks spanning the years 1827 to 2011 – not only chronicles cooking techniques and secrets but sheds light on generations of the rich culture and traditions within the African-American community.

Lupton, a distant cousin of former University of Alabama President Nathaniel Thomas Lupton, donated his collection to the university that is currently housed in the W.S Hoole Special Collections Library. In a press release published by the university, Lupton's widow, Dorothy, spoke about his passion for the collection.

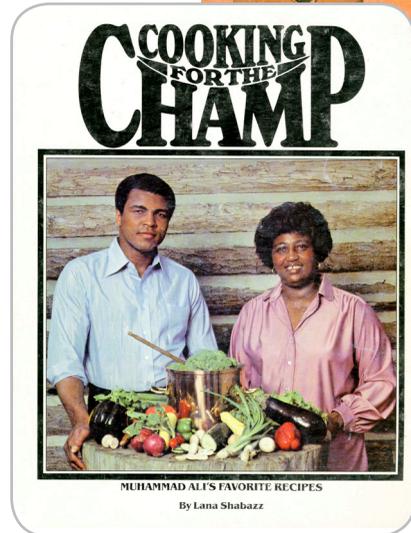
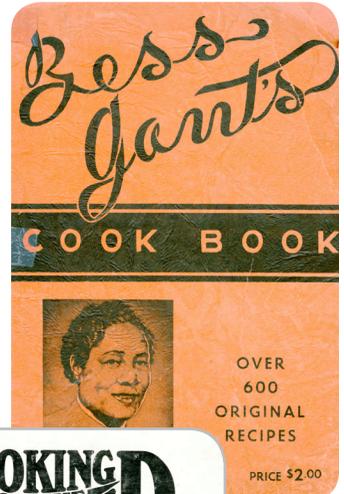
"David had a deep conviction that cookbooks compiled by individuals of America-African heritage needed to be identified and preserved," Dorothy Lupton stated.

Preservation of the cookbooks is a high priority of the Hoole Library in Tuscaloosa. All of the books and other materials are kept in a secure, climate-controlled area. The collections at the Hoole Library are housed in closed stacks, and are noncirculating items. Users are welcome to use the cookbooks, but only in the reading room.

Many of the cookbooks in the collection were written in the first person. This literature allows readers to not only understand the recipes better but also injects humor, the personality of the author and commentary from the period the cookbook was written.

The collection lets users discover various aspects of the relationship between food and African-American history and culture. Well before the popularization of "soul food" and before the emergence of celebrity chefs, countless talented African-American chefs were responsible for the elegant cuisine in U.S. restaurants, hotels, clubs and dining cars, including Rufus Estes, whose "Good Things to Eat" was originally published in 1911. In this collection there's also "The Historical Cookbook of the American Negro" (1958) by The National Council of Negro Women, possibly the first African-American cookbook to link culinary heritage with social, cultural, economic and political history. And there's

Pittsburgh caterer Bess Gant's cookbook was published in 1947.



Author Lana Shabazz's "Cooking for the Champ: Muhammad Ali's Favorite Recipes" was published in 1979.

the slim volume of recipes by Clementine Hunter ("Melrose Plantation Cookbook," published in 1956), the internationally collected folk artist known as the black "Grandma Moses," who turned her talents from the kitchen to the canvas.

Almost every title in the collection links food with music; humor (such as Dick Gregory's "Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat: Cookin' With Mother Nature," 1974); social satire ("Vibration Cooking or the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl" by Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor, 1970); cultural and religious celebrations (Kwanzaa cookbooks, for example); and nearly every other aspect of life. Cookbooks with recipes prepared for Muhammad Ali; famed Chef Leah Chase; and entertainers Mahalia Jackson, Patti LaBelle and Isaac Hayes, among others, are also included.

For the full list of the cookbooks in the collection, visit www.lib.ua.edu/collections/the-david-walker-lupton-african-american-cookbook-collection/lupton-list/.

Passionate protector of American history

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"What's clear to me is that the Smithsonian is part of the glue that holds the country together," Bunch told CBS News national correspondent Chip Reid. "Culture is so important. Culture is something that sometimes is seen as dividing people, but in my mind, culture holds us together – the common cultures we have, the opportunity to find common ground."

Bunch has written books about topics ranging from the black military experience, the American presidency, all-black towns in the American West, diversity in museum management, and the impact of funding and politics on American museums. His most recent book, published in 2019, is "A Fool's Errand: Creating the National Museum of African-American History and Culture in the Age of Bush, Obama and Trump."

Excerpt from Bunch's book "A Fool's Errand," describing opening day at the National Museum of African-American History and Culture:

"My mantra for that day, September 24, 2016, was whatever you do, don't trip and fall. After eleven years of struggling, believing, convincing others to believe, threading the political needle, and surviving nearly 495 fundraising sojourns, tens of thousands had gathered on the National Mall to bear witness to the opening dedication ceremony of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

"Sitting under the museum's 'porch' on a stage with President and Mrs. Obama, former President Bush and First Lady Laura Bush seated just in front of me, Chief Justice John Roberts, the Chancellor of the Smithsonian across the stage from me, the American icon John Lewis next to me, and an array of senior Smithsonian officials everywhere, I finally let myself accept the enormity of what we had accomplished and what the opening of a museum intended to help America confront its tortured racial past could mean to a nation weary of a divisive presidential campaign, and a country still struggling to define its identity in the twenty-first century."

Before being named secretary of the Smithsonian, Bunch was at the helm of the National Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

