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Russell Moore Music Fest Lives On!

By Jean M. Nahomni Mani

The Russell Moore Music Fest (RMMF) is to promote the talents and skills of musicians and artisans for all ages and Nations. In the spirit of the legendary-jazz musician Russell Moore, this music festival is scheduled for Saturday, November 17, 2007 at the Rawhide Pavilion on the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC). This kick off event is to revive the music fest so the RMMF can progress in the years ahead. Admission is free to everyone.

The RMMF is designed to be a positive, non-competitive event where all the participants have an opportunity to "discover" the joy of music and jazz. Whether the participant is an inexperienced student or a veteran performer, everyone will benefit from of the best performers in the country. The festival strives to provide the highest performing, educational, and listening experiences possible. This music fest will be the first concert performance for many of the youth, which Russell Moore was all about promoting the youth to music.

The Saturday line up is in the works for the music fest. Some of the groups that have confirmed are the infamous Cisco from the Tohono O'odham Nation, The Old Time Fiddlers from Gila River and Robert Jackson who is returning harmonica performer from 1999 when he was first featured in the RMMF. Theresa Choyguha will be the emcee for the event.

This year, we will have a youth performing group titled "Outlit." Coordinated by Matthew Talamantez and the Boy's and Girls Club who started this program to provide an *outlit* for the youth to express their thoughts and feelings. As part of their prevention efforts to help the youth focus on the good things in life and to stay away from violence, alcohol, drugs and suicide. There will be an open audition for all of Gila River youth for the Outlit Performing Youth. On September 6th at 6pm and September 13th at 6:30pm at the Komatke Boys & Girls Club. Interested persons can call 520/550-1113 for information.

"Almost all Indians have a natural musical talent. Every Indian school boy and school girl should think about the study of music. It is a way-of-life and a useful and productive one. Music is a source of revelation, and a means of understanding one's self and a means of understanding one's fellow man." Russell "Big Chief" Moore 1912-1983 [Mihio make this a pull quote in the article]

We encourage and want the youth to participant in the RMMF, and not to feel that their ensemble or talent is too inexperienced to participate. All those who participate will be winners, as they will gain a better understanding of and deeper appreciation for art of music and jazz. The philosophy of the festival is that this "personal discovery" will create a better-educated person and consumer of music who will then "preserve, understand, and proclaim" this Native American music and art form through the 21st century.

As an internationally known jazz musician, Russell Moore worked hard to establish himself as one of the best trombone players in the scene. His talent earned him a regular spot with the Louis Armstrong Big Band where he played as a regular from 1944 to 1947. He continued to play with the band on special request until his death in 1983. He also performed at inaugural balls for Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon, as well as playing at one of the receptions for the wedding of Prince Charles and Diana.

Affectionately known as 'Big Chief', Russell Moore was from the Gila River Indian Community located
Russell Moore Article

just south of Phoenix, Arizona. He was born on August 13, 1912 in the area known as Gila Crossing on the Westend of the Community. His parents were J. Newton & Elizabeth Moore, both of GRIC. Russell was 11 years old when his father passed away and he was sent to live with his uncle, William Moore, in Chicago, Illinois. William Moore and his wife, Mary, taught Russell to play several instruments and encouraged him to study Bach, Beethoven, jazz, classical and other types of music. He found a love for music, specifically jazz and decided to focus his efforts on the trombone. Russell made his way home and graduated high school from the Sherman Indian School.

Russell married Ida Powlas from the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin in January of 1957. Ida Moore is well and supports the efforts of the music fest. They had two children, Randall and Amy.

Russell played with the Louis Armstrong big band and became well known internationally. On the "Hello Dolly" album which was featured in the movie "New Orleans" with the famous actress Billie Holiday, you can hear Armstrong say "take it Big Chief." Russell plays a trombone solo of his favorite song *Someday You'll Be Sorry*. In 1973, Russell recorded his first jazz album titled Russell 'Big Chief' Moore Powwow Jazz Band. His second album was recorded in 1974 with previously recorded songs never released.

Another release in 1976 of Russell's music and singing is a CD titled "'Big Chief' Russell Moore and Joe Licari with the Galvanized Jazz Band." Joe a resident of New City, New York, he remembers Big Chief as a man of what jazz and entertainment is all about, having a great time with your friends. Russell sings several songs on the CD as well as trombone solos. The real stamp of an international star was when Russell was asked to play in the international Jazz Festival in Paris, France.

Russell was asked to perform at the Kennedy Center for the Arts in New York City. In March of 1982, he was honored on "First Americans in the Arts" which was broadcast on national television. Russell walked out to middle stage, looked around, then yelled, "Hey Sammy, bring me a chair!" Sammy Davis walked onto stage with a chair and said "I almost said 'yes massah'." He gave the chair to Russell, then said, "I've been working with this guy for a long time." Russell then played a solo of his own song "Wounded Knee Chant" and received the only standing ovation of the evening, which included President Reagan.

Russell was well known in celebrity circles. A photograph given to Russell, from Rosemary Clooney, was signed "Dear Chief, thanks for being nice to Rosemary."

Many times, Russell came home to the Gila River Indian Community to visit and promote the art of music. He would gather his buddies from the Phoenix valley and put on a jazz concert for the Community members. About this time Russell was asked to be the Grand Marshall for the Mul Chu Tha Fair on GRIC, around the year 1981. Russell brought his love of music home to the Community.

There have been many stories of how Community members went to New York on business or for a visit. They would contact Russell and his wife Ida Powlas Moore. Russell would take his visitors to the nicest restaurants and then to an evening of jazz entertainment. No matter what club or fancy restaurant Russell took his guests to, only the best tables up front were given to Moore and his guests. Russell was a friend and greeted everyone, and mostly wanted everyone to enjoy all that jazz.

The music fest corporate sponsor is Gila River Telecommunications, Inc. (GRTI) and Native Technology Solutions is a business sponsor. The GRTI Marketing Department wants to promote a positive event in the community and decided it was time to revive the Russell Moore Music Fest. The performing line up of entertainers is being worked on and the Gila River youth will have a featured portion. **The admission is free to the public.** There will be lots of craft and food vendors.

For RMMF concert information, contact Jean M. Nahomni Mani at 520/796-8866 or email: rmmf@gilanet.net

Watch for a website www.bigchiefmoore.org to be up soon for more information.