SHOWTIME

Sonny Rollins, saxophone colossus

BOSTON — Sonny Rollins is such an exhilarating musician that listeners often short-change the contributions of his band.

It's only natural. The riveting impact of one of his amazing 20-minute solos makes it easy to forget that the tenor saxophonist has company on the bandstand.

Since he rose to jazz prominence in 1957, Rollins has never been known for having a stable band with a distinct sound. But that is changing. His current quartet plays with sympatico — a distinct feel and empathy for the master — and has become a tight musical unit.

Its members — pianist Mark Soskin, trombonist Clifton Anderson, electric bassist Jerome Harris, and drummer Tommy Campbell — have been on the Rollins team for between 5 and 10 years a piece.

"It takes playing together a long time to bring in these other elements," Rollins says. "I'm never recognized for that, but it is something we work hard to achieve. They never talk to 'Sonny Rollins' band', maybe now they will."

The group sound is important to him now.

"By the nature of the way I play, I'm always out there naked. At this stage, I'd like a little protection so I can examine more and be more contemplative."

The tall, bearded Rollins is no clockwatcher. His songs are never of the 3-minute pop music variety and tend to stretch about 20 minutes. Yet, length is not the controlling factor.

SONNY ROLLINS.

"I'm just trying to create something which is a complete story in itself from beginning to end. If I really have to think about how long it is, there is no sense doing it. You're involved in the creativity, trying to reach a point," Rollins says.

He often is called the greatest living tenor saxophonist, yet self-improvement is his driving force.

"I am never satisfied with my work. I am always looking for better performance," Rollins said. "As an artist, I go through so much time trying to perfect what I'm doing, so I can have control over my presentation."

Rollins, now 58, lives on a 10-acre farm 120 miles north of New York City with his wife, Lucille, and assorted pets. When not touring, he spends most of each day practicing.

He was born in Harlem in 1929, son of immigrants from the Virgin Islands. His early jazz playing was greatly influenced by 1930s and '40s tenor giants Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young.

Have you heard?

By Penny S. Demps

THAT after years in the making, Miami Vice star Philip Michael Thomas will release the debut single of his latest solo album "Somebody," TV's prime time idol is particularly excited about the LP because of the caliber of talent it showcases, including Grammy-nominated recording stars Ashford and Simpson, who produced several cuts.

* * *

THAT Derek Walcott, the Caribbean poet and playwright who has given pungent voice to themes of cultural identity and assimilation was recently awarded Queen Elizabeth II's Gold Medal for Poetry during ceremonies in London. Walcott, in his 50's, was born in St. Lucia, and teaches English at Boston University.

* * *

THAT super-songstress Patti LaBelle, who had a featured role in the movie "A Soldier's Story," will star in her first major dramatic role in the upcoming movie, "Sing." Patti plays a music teacher in the musical movie which is based on the annual talent competitions in Brooklyn, NY schools. The film is slated for release in February.

PATTI LaBELLE

PHILIP MICHAEL THOMAS

* * *

THAT is's time to head to Atlanta, because although black artists have been largely ignored since the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's, they will now have an unprecedented stage to display their creativity this week in a city where black culture has flourished. The first National Black Arts Festival, a nine-day celebration beginning July 30, will showcase the contributions made by black artists to music, dance, theatre, film and visual, literary, folk and performance arts . . The extravaganza runs through August 7.

* * *

THAT the first federal building in the nation named for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. will be located in Atlanta and will contain the FBI's southern headquarters. Ironically, Dr. King, who was slain in 1968, was dogged with surveillance for years by the FBI's J. Edgar Hoover, who falsely accused him of being a communist.

* * *

THAT talk-show host-movie producer Tony Brown is appealing the "R" rating his anti-drug movie "The White Girl" received by the Motion Picture Assn. of America (MPAA). Brown lamented, "The MPAA believes that most parents should accompany their kids because of the strong drug content, but how can you do an anti-drug film without drugs?" The movie will go into general release in early 1989.

* * *

THAT on a sad note, flamboyant singer Sylvester was recently diagnosed as having AIDS. The San Francisco-based singer known for his bizarre costuming and music, is resting at his home after a short hospital stay. Always straightforward about his sexuality, Sylvester was heavily involved in fundraisers across the country for AIDS victims. His hit records include "Someone Like You" and "Dance (Disco Heat)."

* * *

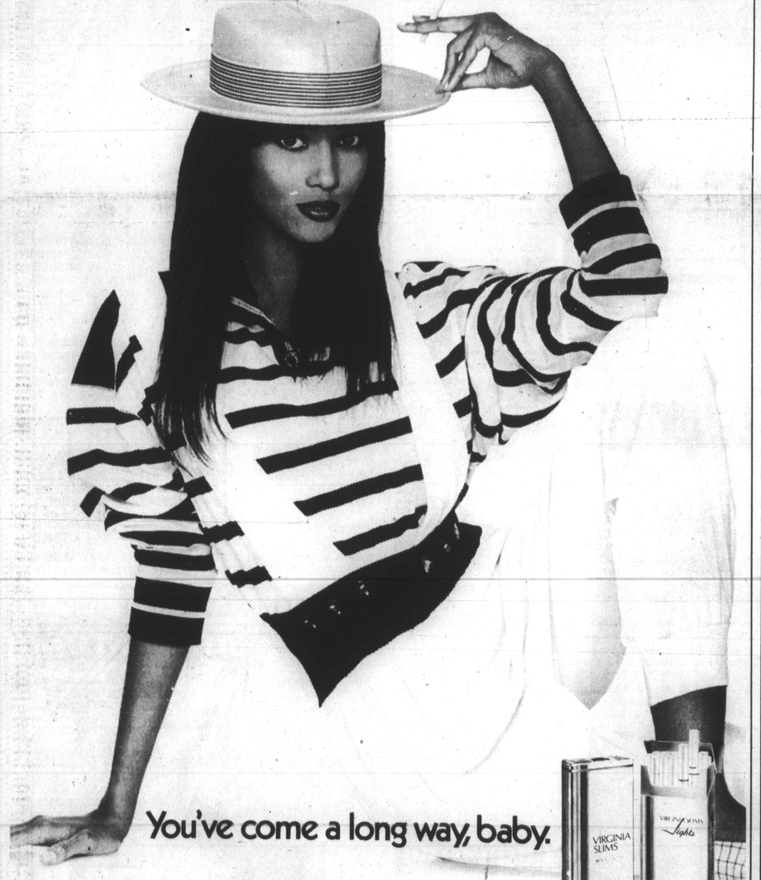
THAT Lynn's Productions, a musical productions company located in Cranbury, NJ, recently announced the production of "Secret Desires," a soul, R&B, club musical concert that will be held at the Pace University Schimmel Center for the Arts in New York on August 6. For more info, call (609) 443-0527.

* * *

THAT jazz violinist Jen-Luc Ponty with special guests, The Yellowjackets, August 9, at the Hershey Theatre. The concert will showcase his debut Columbia album, "The Gift of Time," which is currently ranked in the top five on jazz charts.

FAMED JAZZ TRUMPETER Miles Davis visits an exhibition of his paintings in Tokyo. "It's like looking at a diary," the raspy-voiced 62-year-old said about one of 31 works on display. The light-colored acrylics range in price from $1,000-$9,000.

VIRGINIA SLIMS



You've come a long way, baby.

Menthol and Lights Menthol

Menthol: 14 mg "tar," 0.9 mg nicotine—Lights Menthol: 8 mg "tar," 0.6 mg nicotine av. per cigarette, FTC Report Feb '85.

SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema, And May Complicate Pregnancy.

© Philip Morris Inc. 1988

METRO PROFILE

■ High School Sports 3C
■ Kids Talk 4C
■ Obituaries 5C

Lena K. Lee reaches the magic milestone

AFRO by John H. Murphy, III

GIFTS FOR THE HONOREE — Former Mayor Clarence "Du" Burns and former States Attorney Milton Allen bear gifts for the honoree.

By Maxine L. Wallace
AFRO Staff Writer

Nearly one hundred persons from all walks of life on Saturday gathered at Jeanniers Restaurant for the birthday celebration of a noted woman, whose contributions have graced her community, her city, her state, and her world.

Lena King Lee, a retired delegate, lawyer and Baltimore City School teacher, was the celebrity for the evening. On July 17, she celebrated her 80th birthday.

The momentous occasion was informal at the request of the celebrant, but nonetheless reflected the heartfelt camaraderie between Lee and fellow delegates.

J. Hiram Butler, a noted friend of Lee's served as the Master of Ceremonies.

He called upon persons assembled who are Lee's notable acquaintances and friends to give words concerning the celebrant.

They all spoke of how long they had known Lee and of her many accomplishments in the House of Delegates.

"She is a fine and lovely person," said Butler.

Included among those who brought words of gratitude were Mary Pat Clarke, Delegate Elijah Cummings, and former Mayor Clarence "Du" Burns.

Also on the program, Mary Conaway, Register of Wills favored the audience with music in song.

Dramatic Reading also enhanced the atmosphere of celebration and friendship.

A delicious buffet dinner was enjoyed by all.

Lena Lee, a native of Pittsburgh, PA moved to Baltimore in 1931.

Lee is a graduate of Cheyney State College and of Morgan State College.

She obtained a Master's Degree from New York University and pursued graduate work at John Hopkins University.

Her professional training was acquired from the University of Maryland Law School and from Seminars in law.

She received additional training in Parliamentary Law at McCoy College.

She had taught early education in public schools in Pennsylvania and resumed her work in the field of public education while in Baltimore until her retirement in 1966.

Educational positions held include classroom teacher, demonstration teacher, practice teacher (for training of students preparing to teach), Summer School principal, Vice-principal, and elementary schools principal.

Lee was admitted to the Bar of Baltimore City and Maryland in 1952 and actively practiced law until the early 80's.

Her list of contributions is many. To name a few, she was a professional lecturer, assisted in fundraising activities, conducted and assisted in political campaigns, and owned and operated Biddle Theatre in Baltimore.

She received numerous citation for her involvement in political action and civic leadership.

Lee is the widow of Robert R. Lee, a businessman and fraternal leader.

Lena King Lee is listed in the third edition of Who's Who of American Women."

AFRO by John H. Murphy, III

MORE GUESTS — Pictured left to right is Jennie Mason, Paul and Georgia Chester, and Lena.

AFRO by John H. Murphy, III

GREETINGS — Lena greets her guest, Nellie Moore (pictured left). Shown in the background is Patrick Lansey.

AFRO by John H. Murphy, III

DELEGATES REUNITED — Pictured left to right is Frank Conaway, Margaret Murphy, Hattie Harrison, Lena, and Walter Dean.

AFRO by John H. Murphy, III

A GREAT TIME — The occasion was one to be remembered. Pictured left to right is Ella White Campbell, Myra W. Curtis, and Alice Cooper Lee.

AFRO by John H. Murphy, III

CELEBRITY IN THE MIDST — The host and hostess pose for a picture with the honoree. Shown left to right is Nickie Randolph, Anethia Williams, Hiram Butler, Lena K. Lee, the honoree, and Lisa Randolph.

AFRO by John H. Murphy, III

IN THE CROWD — Pictured left to right is Amy Hawkins, Clara Jones, and Mary Conaway.