

Come blow your horn

By Terry Perkins

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Friday marks the 80th anniversary of the birth of Miles Dewey Davis III. The trumpeter, who was born in Alton and grew up in East St. Louis, is one of the most famous and influential jazz musicians ever. His distinctive trumpet style and sheer musical genius changed the course of jazz several times during a career that spanned almost half a century and ended with his death in 1991.

To commemorate the anniversary, a special concert billed as "Lifting the Legacy: Miles, Mo' Music and Juneteenth Jazz," is being held at Blackmon's Plaza featuring another trumpet player with deep local roots: Russell Gunn. Although he has made his home in Atlanta for several years, Gunn grew up in East St. Louis, where he honed his musical technique in the first-rate Lincoln High School jazz program directed by Ron Carter.

Anne Walker, director of the Illinois Freedom Trails Legacies of Hope project and the driving force behind the 80th birthday event, hopes this concert will be the beginning of an annual celebration of Davis' musical legacy in the city in which he grew up.

"The Freedom Trails project is all about working to preserve and promote sites in Illinois that are related to African-American heritage and history," Walker says. "And Miles Davis certainly made a historic contribution to jazz. His legacy certainly continues to have a lasting impact on our culture."

Gunn became involved in the event through Ron Myers, a doctor, minister and musician whom he first met while attending Jackson State University in Mississippi.

"Ron Myers was working in the Delta region to provide health care for extremely poor people in that region," Gunn says. "I got to know him, and we've kept in touch over the years. He called me up earlier this year and told me he was going to be in East St. Louis for a Miles Davis birthday event and said that he thought I should be part of it, too."

"So Ron will be playing with his band at Blackmon's, then I'll be playing with Reggie Thomas, Montez Coleman, John King and Amos Brewer - who all came out of the Lincoln High School band. I thought that, because this is about Miles and East St. Louis, I should work with those guys instead of bringing my band from Atlanta."

Walker says Gunn "is the ideal young jazz musician to feature at this tribute to Miles."

Miles Davis 80th Anniversary Tribute

When: 7:00 p.m. Friday

Where: Blackmon's Plaza, 127 Collinsville Avenue, East St. Louis

How much: \$35 (adults) and \$25 (16 and under)

More info: 618-397-5411