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Detroit Trumpeter Marcus Belgrave Is 2009 Eminent Artist

Detroit's premier jazz musician and educator receives \$50,000 prize from The Kresge Foundation



Marcus Belgrave, Photographer: John M. Galloway/Special to The Detroit News

Master jazz trumpet player Marcus Belgrave — who has enthralled audiences world-wide with his musical virtuosity and mentored scores of aspiring young musicians — has been named the 2009 Kresge Eminent Artist by The Kresge Foundation.

The award and \$50,000 prize recognizes Belgrave's lifelong musical achievements and his personal and professional contributions to music performance and education in Metropolitan Detroit. The foundation, through its Kresge Arts in Detroit initiative, annually supports the Kresge Eminent Artist Award, Kresge Artist Fellowships, and Kresge Arts Support grants. The Eminent Artist Award is administered by the College for Creative Studies.

Reflecting on his decades-long career, the 73-year-old Belgrave says, "I was designed to be a musician. It gave me a good personality, because I was always around people who made you humble. Music also gave me much character. And I was able to open many doors through music."

His selection as this year's Kresge Eminent Artist is "the ultimate appreciation," he continues. "The award is a culmination of a period of my life and shows me that the work I've been doing has been appreciated. Most of the young people I've touched are now quite famous. I told them the same thing my father told me: Music will take you places you could never imagine. And that has happened."



Marcus with wife and vocalist Joan Belgrave,
Photo by Jean-Claude Quenum

Inspired at a young age by Louis Armstrong, Belgrave grew up in a poor, but musically talented, family living in the steel-mill town of Chester, Pennsylvania. He cut his teeth on the jazz circuit touring with Ray Charles in the late 1950s, and embraced the Motown sound when he moved to Detroit in 1963 to begin recording with Berry Gordy Jr., founder of Motown Records, at the Hitsville U.S.A. recording studio on West Grand Boulevard. Over the years, Belgrave has played with the top names in jazz and many legendary entertainers, including Ella Fitzgerald, Sammy Davis Jr., Tony Bennett and Aretha Franklin.

In the mid-70s, Belgrave established the Jazz Development Workshop in Detroit and began working with youngsters to develop their musical talent. A dedicated educator and mentor, he has taught jazz classes and lessons at elementary, middle, and high schools in the city and at a dozen colleges nationwide. He also serves as an international jazz ambassador, traveling all over the world to share the music he loves. In 1997, for example, he and five other Michigan jazz masters made a six-nation tour of Africa and the Middle East, funded as a cultural exchange effort by the U.S. Agency for International Development, a federal agency providing economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide.

From 2000 to 2007, Belgrave took an eight-piece band on the road to 50 American cities where they performed “Tribute to Louis Armstrong,” in observance of the world-renown trumpet player’s 100th birthday. The next year, in 2008, the city of Detroit named him its Jazz Master Laureate, one of the many honors, awards, and tributes he has received in his lifetime.

“Through his dedication and virtuosity as a jazz trumpeter and teacher, Marcus Belgrave has fanned the flames of musical greatness in Detroit and sown the seeds for successive generations of talented musicians,” says Rip

Rapson, president of the Kresge Foundation. “We are proud to claim him as a Detroiter and to salute him as an artist of the highest order.”



Marcus Belgrave in the 70's, Photograph by Leni Sinclair

The foundation will publish a monograph to commemorate Marcus Belgrave's work and distribute it to organizations, institutions, and libraries in the region.

The Kresge Eminent Artist Award recognizes an exceptional artist in the visual, performing, or literary arts for his or her professional achievements and contributions to the cultural community, and encourages that individual's pursuit of a chosen art form as well as an ongoing commitment to Metropolitan Detroit. The award is unrestricted and is given annually to one artist who has lived and worked in Wayne, Oakland, or Macomb Counties for a significant number of years. The first-ever Kresge Eminent Artist Award was presented last year to Detroit visual artist Charles McGee.

“Marcus Belgrave, Detroit's premier jazz trumpeter, is a natural choice as the first performing artist to receive the Kresge Eminent Artist Award,” says Richard L. Rogers, president of the College for Creative Studies. “Marcus' exceptional career and ongoing commitment to our community deserves significant recognition and sets an example to all aspiring musicians. Visual artists, writers and performers like Marcus serve as potent forces in bringing change to Detroit and are exactly the kind of people that Kresge Arts in Detroit was developed to recognize.”

Nominations for the award are made by the Kresge Arts in Detroit Advisory Council, a 19-member volunteer group of leaders in the Metropolitan Detroit cultural community who provide external oversight to Kresge Arts in Detroit. The award recipient is selected by an independent review panel composed of well-respected, knowledgeable artists and arts professionals from the Detroit area.

The 2009 review panel included Ian Ding, assistant principal percussionist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and founding member of New Music Detroit; Aku Kadogo, Wayne State University faculty member and director of the Black Theatre Program; Anne Parsons, president of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra; Lynn Crawford, founder and editor of the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit journal; and George Tysh, poet and faculty member at The Roeper School.