

Harvard Square Celebrates Black History Month and Hosts a Public Poetry Reading and Vigil for Haiti led by the Cambridge "Poet Populist" Jean Dany Joachim.

Join the Cambridge Poet Populist and Friends for a gathering of Reading and Music in Celebration of Black History Month and Lincoln's Birthday and a Vigil for Haiti.

Date: Friday, February 12th from 5:30 p.m. until 6:30 p.m.

Location: Out of Town News Kiosk in Harvard Square.

****THIS EVENT IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!**

Jean-Dany Joachim is the Cambridge Poet Populist. As the creator and producer of *City Night Reading Series*, he brings together poets, writers, performers and lovers of literature for the celebration of the art of word in the Boston and NYC areas. He is the author of "*Chen Plenn – Leta*" and "*White Dress in January*", and his work has appeared in anthologies and numerous literary magazines. His mantra is: *La vie est belle!*

For more Information: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/CAC/Community/PoetPopulist.cfm>

Harvard for Haiti Benefit Concert

Date: Friday, February 12, 2010 7:00 p.m. -9:00 p.m.

Location: Sanders Theatre - \$10 for students and \$25 for adults

In the aftermath of the earthquake, the Haitian people face unthinkable hardship, devastation, and destruction. As medical relief efforts following Haiti's devastating earthquake begin to shift toward stabilizing the battered island nation, including feeding, supporting, and housing the survivors, the need for monetary support remains vast. Haiti has many surgical teams, tents, and trucks in place now. But those ongoing efforts require fiscal support, as will the upcoming cleanup and rebuilding.

Harvard student artists, in collaboration with the Office for the Arts, will host this benefit concert to raise some much-needed cash. .

Famed artists in residence such as internationally acclaimed violinist Ryu Goto '10, award winning pianist Charlie Albright '11, the heralded jazz pianist Malcolm Campbell '10, and dancer Merritt Moore '11 of the Zurich Ballet Company will perform, along with a variety of student singing and dance troupes, including the Kuumba Singers, the Harvard Glee Club, the Harvard Caribbean Dance Team and the Modern Dance Co., will take the stage at Sanders Theater for a two-hour concert, from 7 to 9 p.m. Tickets are available through the Harvard Box Office.

Harvard and the Office for the Arts are underwriting production costs so that all proceeds from ticket sales can go directly to Partners in Health, a nonprofit group that has been working in Haiti for decades, to further support its aid work.

The University will provide a live feed of the concert for those unable to attend. We hope that the Harvard community around the world can participate in this event and donate to Partners in Health. To purchase tickets: <http://www.harvard.edu/harvardforhaiti>

In honor of the Harvard Square Business Association's 100th Anniversary 1910-2010 we are collecting Oral Histories from HSBA Member about their experiences in Harvard Square past and present and their thoughts about the future. We hope you will enjoy this feature on our website as it continues to develop over the year.

The Harvard Square Business Association remembers past and present members during Black History Month.

Remembering Club 47, written by Gavin W. Kleespies, The Cambridge Historical Society"

Harvard Square's Club 47, later named Club Passim, was one of the first venues in a northern city to feature African American blues musicians from the South. Many of the blues greats such as Mississippi John Hurt and Reverend Gary Davis passed through Cambridge and found a welcoming home in a time when much of the country was hostile if not outright dangerous. Cambridge residents Dick Waterman, Ralph Rinzler, Jim Rooney, Joe Boyd, and others helped make this circuit possible, while people like Nancy Sweezy and Betsy Siggins gave blues musicians a place to stay when Cambridge hotels would not rent to African Americans.

As a part of the Centennial Celebration of the Harvard Square Business Association we are featuring brief portraits of Harvard Square businesses and their role in the history of Cambridge. Below are three photos and brief snapshots of some of the many blues musicians that performed at Club 47 and have been a part of Harvard Square's history in the past 100 years. (The information in this article is from two interviews with Betsy Siggins of the New England Folk Music Archives, one on February 9, 2010 by Robin Lapidus and one on February 10, 2010 by Gavin W. Kleespies of the Cambridge Historical Society.)

Jackie Washington was a very popular performer at Club 47 for most of the time the club was open. He began playing there while he was a student at Emerson College and became a fixture of the folk music scene in Cambridge and Boston. He drew musical influences from the folk landscape that surrounded him as well as from his African American and Puerto Rican roots. He was one of the first people in the area to sing Hispanic folk music and became known as an extraordinary performer.

However, his time in the area also reflected the challenges faced by a person of color in the 1960s. Betsy Siggins, former staff member at Club 47, remembers one time he was arrested in Boston. He had been walking down Commonwealth Avenue when a police car stopped him. When he asked why he was being stopped, the police told him it was

because he was “abroad in the night.” An altercation followed, and Jackie Washington ended up in jail. He later challenged the arrest in court and won, but it was a painful experience and a reminder for his friends in Club 47 of the real challenges faced on a daily basis by performers of color just outside the walls of the club.

Jackie Washington later signed with Vanguard Records, becoming one of their first artists of color.

Club 47 became an important stop in a circuit that brought some of the blues greats from the South and introduced them to audiences in northern cities. People like Dick Waterman became major conduits along this trail, working to make contacts and help to make the trip from the South to the northern cities one that was adventuresome rather than fearsome.

The arrival of musicians like Mississippi John Hurt and others that traveled this circuit opened the eyes of the club staff, folk fans, and other performers. It showed that there was an entire country out there, populated by real people with real stories, some of which were stories of real hard times. It showed that there was a lot more to this country than what was seen in Cambridge. For performers like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez the performances and stories of blues musicians like Mississippi John Hurt at Club 47 became a window to a different perspective on the whole country.

Betsy Siggins, former staff member at Club 47, remembers that meeting these performers and hearing their stories of a different kind of an American life in the club left an impression that hasn't wavered since.

When the first African American blues performers began performing at Club 47, there wasn't a hotel in Harvard Square that would allow a black man to stay. Many of the performers would stay with staff members from the club. Betsy Siggins remembers the experience of having blues greats like Reverend Gary Davis stay on her couch. When people heard he was in town, Siggins would find 20 people had gathered at her home to hear him play and to tell his stories. Everyone knew that they were a part of something that had not yet been discovered.

Betsy also remembers that Davis, a blind man, had one suit, one coat and one hat and that most of the time he was wearing them. In a habit grown from fear, he slept with everything he owned on his body.

Ifeanyi Menkiti, Owner, Grolier Poetry Book Shop

The story of my ownership of the Grolier Poetry Book Shop, the nation's oldest poetry-only bookstore, will strike many as a most unlikely story. Born in Onitsha, Nigeria, I first came to the United States to attend college. A philosopher by training, I have taught at Wellesley College for 36 years. But with zero experience in retail, prior to getting involved in the store, I am even now still learning the basics of this sort of enterprise. So the question I am often asked is this: what were you thinking of when getting involved in

the bookstore business, when bookstores are failing all over the place, given the economy and the pressures of the internet? As for poetry, who reads poetry anyway? In short what sort of craziness took over your head, jumping into a territory where others, for good reason, fear to tread?

I am not sure I have any clear rational answers to any of these questions. All I know is that I have always loved poetry. While an undergraduate at Pomona College in California, I wrote a Bachelor's thesis on the poetry of Ezra Pound and that thesis received the college's F.S. Jennings Distinguished Senior Thesis Award. Needless to say, the award encouraged my future journey in poetry. In any case, following Pomona, I came east to New York and then to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to do graduate work in philosophy at Harvard, studying with Professor John Rawls, my dissertation adviser and mentor.

I have now owned the Grolier for four years. When the store was on the verge of closing, I decided to step in and help keep it alive. It was for me a labor of love, still is a labor of love. People come from all over the world to this little haven in the midst of Harvard Square, seeking poetry and the companionship of poets. Since its founding in 1927, the Grolier has had only three owners--Gordon Cairnie, Louisa Solano, and myself. My hope is that the store and its proud tradition will continue into the next century, and beyond. But who knows what Harvard Square would look like then, or whether there will still be books around--books as we know them; not books as some digitized funny-little-thing, the size of one's right thumb. I find it hard to imagine the Grolier disappearing. Of the poets who have visited or established a strong relationship with the book shop over the years, including e.e. cummings, Marianne Moore, Conrad Aiken, T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, Allen Ginsberg, Mary Oliver, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Donald Hall, Robert Creeley, I find it hard to imagine that the spirit of these writers will allow such a thing. How can we live without poetry shared by word of mouth, in a physical setting, eye turned to page, voice received by ear, and a community of persons taking it all in, and, at the end, saying: this is as it should be.

Lemlem McCrary, Owner, Lemlem's Gallery

I have been in business now four years this coming spring. How time flies when you are having fun. Anyway the reason I opened a store in Harvard Square is, first of all I love Harvard Square for its diversity. And I wasn't far off; it has proven to be true. I meet people from all over the world literally. At the same time I feel I am in a small village. Harvard Square is a college town. I love the students' presence and parents visiting and the hustle-bustle around graduation. It is hard to put in words, other than to say, it is a special place to be, with unique people and unique businesses.