



Mike Roy/The Journal News

Mount Vernon resident LaChanze, Tony Award winner and star of "The Color Purple" on Broadway, received a key to the city from Mount Vernon Mayor Ernest D. Davis yesterday at City Hall. The ceremony was part of festivities for Mount Vernon's Triple Hill Music Festival.

3-month music festival under way

Mount Vernon puts spotlight on its many home-grown artists

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The Journal News

MOUNT VERNON — The Westchester Arts Council and Mount Vernon kicked off a three-month music festival yesterday by presenting Tony Award-winning actress LaChanze with a key to the city.

The Triple Hill Music Festival is an education program that will present 14 instructional workshops and 20 performances of gospel, R&B, jazz, Brazilian, and folk and blues music. Many of the performances, like LaChanze's, will feature city artists.

"There must be something in the water or in the air," said Mayor Ernest Davis. "Mount Vernon is a hotbed for talent, and our job is to cultivate it."

LaChanze, who played "Celie" in Broadway's "The Color Purple," also spoke to students at Mount Vernon High School and sang for

On the Web

For the full schedule of the festival events go to the Westchester Arts Council Web site at www.westarts.com

them.

"Every once in a while, we have to extract one of our citizens and lift them up high," Davis said. "We don't give these things out lightly. It may not unlock the doors to City Hall, but it unlocks our hearts."

The anchor of the festival is an exhibit from Ohio's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, "Rock My Soul: The Black Legacy of Rock and Roll," to be displayed at the Mount Vernon Public Library starting today until June. The exhibit includes the work of 10 black artists, each inspired by different musical genres.

The festival was organized with help from a \$115,000 grant from the state Music Fund — money collected under a legal settlement reached after a probe into "payola" schemes between major record labels and radio stations.

City resident Donna Jackson, the festival's creative director, approached the council with the idea of bringing the arts to different venues in the city.

Janet Langsam, executive director of the council, said that by working with Jackson, Recreation Commissioner Karen Watts and other city officials, the festival was able to become a reality.

Musicians include bluesman Guy Davis, whose parents, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, lived in the city; folk guitarist KJ Denhart of Ossining; recording artist Kirk Franklin; and Samba NY.

Activities for the youth include samba musician Philip Galinsky offering hands-on after-school and community workshops in drumming and the DJ Scratch Academy holding sessions at the Boys & Girls Club.

Other venues include the Doles Center and schools throughout the city.

The festival's name, "Triple Hill," refers to the three hills in Mount Vernon's city seal.

Davis stood with City Comptroller Maureen Walker and City Council President Steven Horton

when he presented LaChanze the key.

She was visibly moved by the ceremony and said she is involved with the festival because of the city's youth.

"I am so touched and humbled," she said. "I give back because I see so much hope in these children."

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