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## **Mt. Vernon's LaChanze helps kick off Triple Hill Music Festival and receives key to the city**

*By Danielle De Souza*

On Friday, April 13 "The Color Purple" star and Tony Award winner LaChanze kicked off the Westchester Arts Council's Triple Hill Music Festival and received the key to the city during a well attended press conference in Mount Vernon City Hall.

Running from April to June of 2007, The Triple Hill Music Festival is a dynamic music education program that will present 14 instructional workshops (Master Classes) and 20 performances of Gospel, R&B, Jazz, Brazilian, Folk and Blues music to the 85,000 residents of Mt. Vernon through in-and after-school programming and public performances.

The anchor of the Festival is an exhibit from Cleveland, Ohio's Rock & Roll Hall of Fame entitled "Rock My Soul: the Black Legacy of Rock and Roll" which examines the contributions of African-Americans in the development of Rock and Roll through gospel, rhythm & blues, jazz, folk and blues music.

The purpose of Triple Hill Music Festival is exposure, awareness and hands-on involvement through direct interaction with musical material and many performances will include such local artists as LaChanze.

"Mount Vernon is a hotbed for talent," said Mayor Ernest Davis before presenting LaChanze with the key to the city. "Something must be in the air or in the water because the talent keeps flowing." LaChanze sat beside her husband, Derek Fordjour, as the mayor showered her with accolades.

Davis was accompanied by City Comptroller Maureen Walker and City Council President Steven Horton when he presented the key to the city to LaChanze.

"Besides being a key to the city, this key also unlocks our hearts," the Mayor said. "Please accept this for the work you do in Mount Vernon. We love you."

"I am so touched today, said LaChanze. "I am trying not to get emotional, but I am an actress," she laughed.

She went on to say, "You have truly unlocked the key to my heart. My husband and I are proud members of the Mount Vernon community and we love you. I give back because I see so much hope in these children."

As you might know, LaChanze made her Broadway debut in *Uptown*. The versatile performer is universally loved for her Tony-nominated performance in Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty's *Once On This Island* as well as her work in *The Bubbly Black Girl Sheds Her Chameleon Skin*, *Company*, *Baby*, *Ragtime* and *The Color Purple*.

During the press conference LaChanze also stated that she is happy to be taking part in the festival.

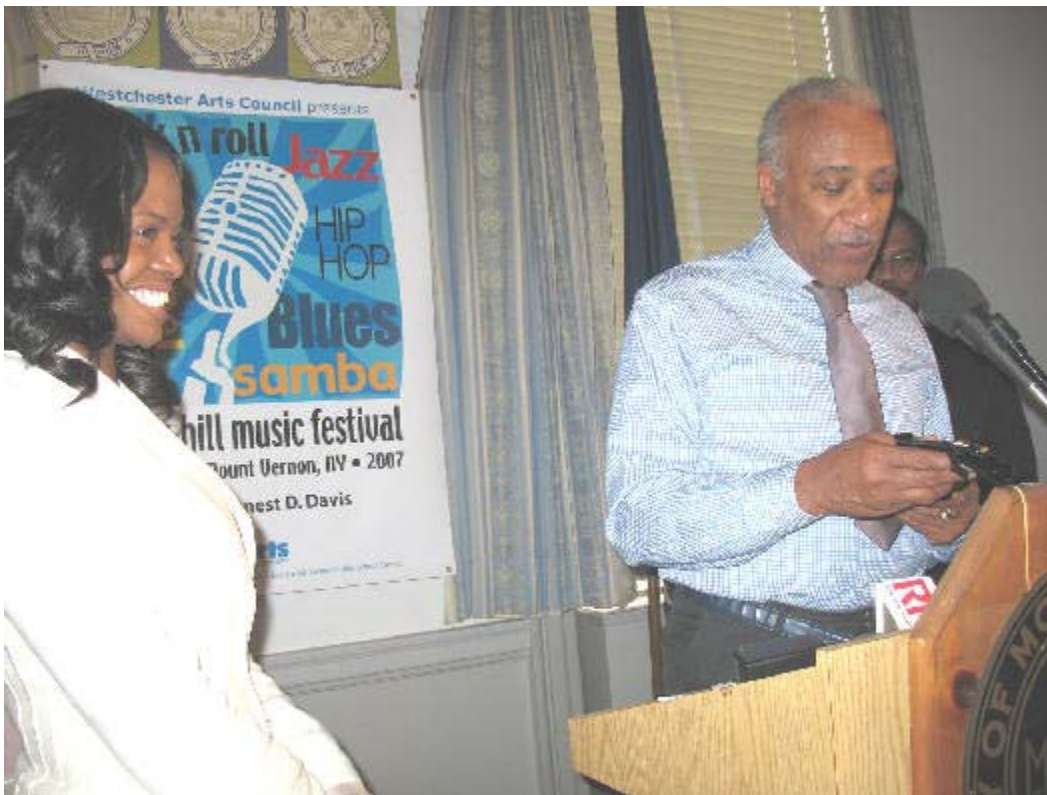
Local and national artists have been scheduled to take part in the program, such as The Duke Ellington Show Choir, Acid Jazz progenitor

Melvin Sparks, New York City's Scratch DJ Academy, Guy Davis, bluesman and son of the late New Rochelle resident, Ossie Davis and his wife Ruby Dee, and Samba New York. The artists will appear in free community concerts and a companion educational curriculum will be available to the schools.

The Triple Hill Festival is a project of the Westchester Arts Council in collaboration with the city of Mount Vernon and the Mount Vernon Public Library. The New York State Music Fund granted the Westchester Arts Council \$115,000 last fall toward the festival.

"It is just so wonderful to bring back to Mount Vernon," said Janet Langsam, director of the Westchester Arts Council. "Mount Vernon is a community that appreciates the arts as the soul of the community."

Mount Vernon resident and the festival's creative director, Donna Jackson, initially approached the City Council with the concept and played a major role in making the festival a reality.



*Mayor Davis preparing to present LaChanze with the key to the city*



*Mt. Vernon resident, Donna Jackson, the festival's Creative Director*



*Janet Langsam, Executive Director of the Westchester Arts Council*