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Morris Howard

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Land of Funk Art

Morris Howard

I'm Morris Howard, an artist here in Dayton and creator of the funk mural down on Stone Street, now Land of Funk Way. I just have a short presentation on some of the art that is available regarding funk music; unfortunately, there's not a lot.

So, before I start the presentation, I wanted to delve into that for a few minutes. What I discovered more than anything else, and what I relayed to Sharon, was that there is just not a lot devoted to the genre. I realized that that's got to change: we need more art toward funk; that was my main discovery. The funk mural was completed in 2018, late September, early October. That's how Sharon and I met. She invited me here. I'm really grateful that she asked me to be a part of this.

[Slideshow begins]

- The woman standing next to me is the widow of Johnny Wilder, who was the leader of the Dayton funk band Heatwave; she came out to the ceremony the day of our dedication.
- These are the members of Faze-O, and on the end is Keith Harrison, a real good friend of mine and my brother.
- Steve Shockley from Lakeside; the young man on the other side is Simeon Oyeyemi, who helped me—most particularly on the Lakeside mural.
- I couldn't do every single member from every single band and I'm still catching flak [laughter]. But I have to say, I picked more Ohio Players than I did anybody else. I don't know if it was self-

conscious but they were “the band,” the impetus. At the very top is Keith Harrison from Faze-O. That's Tyrone Crum from Faze-O. On horn, that's Pee Wee Middlebrooks of the Ohio Players, Steve Shockley of Lakeside, Satch from the Ohio Players, Mark Wood from Lakeside, Johnny Wilder from Heatwave, Billy Beck from the Ohio Players, Byron Byrd from Sun.

- We have two murals that were just dedicated to some of the members from the various bands: We have Steve Arrington on the left, Leroy “Sugarfoot” Bonner, who is one of my favorite entertainers of all time. Then we have, to the bottom left, Marshall Jones, who was the bass player for the Ohio Players; Diamond Williams, the drummer for the Ohio Players, who was here yesterday; Junie Morrison. Then we have Mark Adams and Mark “Drac” Hicks from Slave. Then we have Keith Wilder and Roger Troutman.
- [Photo of all panels of mural] Here's more of a comprehensive layout of the mural itself. For each band, we came up with a concept like an album cover. Sun—we could kind of use their album cover. With Zapp, we based the mural on *Computer Love*, and that's what we did with the other artists.
- Now this is a very interesting mural. I could never get a good shot: there's always somebody parked in this parking lot; it's on Germantown Street, and it's across the street from the DeSoto Bass Courts, and I'm having a hard time finding out who painted it. But it's a mural, as you can see, to Zapp, and there's a Lakeside reference in there. I thought it was a very interesting mural. And there's some other cultural references around, like Hook's Barbecue, one of the mainstays here in Dayton, and Good Samaritan Hospital, which is gone now. But it's a decent reference to funk. It has the Carillon Tower, Edwin C. Moses, and Paul Laurence Dunbar.
- This is a mural right across the street from Roger Troutman's historical marker and his statue. I don't know who did it. It's in disrepair. But visually this was the impetus for me to create the funk mural, because at the time when I saw this in 2015/2016, there was no historical marker there for Roger. I dug the mural, but I didn't see any other references to any other bands

artistically, so this was the impetus to thinking about doing something to honor all the funk bands that came out of Dayton. I came out of here with more questions than I did answers.

- This is Roger's statue, *I Can Make You Dance*, created by Dayton artist Michael Bashaw. It was commissioned by a nonprofit group called the Phoenix Group.
- And there's Roger's historical marker. Howard played a video slideshow by Lennie Pringle, produced following the dedication of Stone Street as Land of Funk Way. It was actually me, Keith Harrison, and a young lady who was helping me on the project at that time, Brittini Long, who came up with the name. We were all brainstorming at Panera Bread on Brown Street. Keith said, "Land of Funk," and that was it.

Because of the lack of art not only regarding funk music but music in general in the Dayton area, I'm seriously thinking about how to propose another mural that would be for some of the bands that weren't quite as famous, like Platypus and Shadow.

The HAALO Project is a county project, a county juvenile project started by Brittini Long from Montgomery County Juvenile Court and Jerri Stanard from K12 Gallery and Tejas. I believe it's double-digit years since it started. It's an acronym for Helping Adolescents Achieve Long-term Objectives. It allows kids who have had a little trouble in the court to participate in public art. And it's been very successful. I believe we had about sixteen kids help complete that funk mural downtown. I teach in two juvenile court facilities, and I've been going in as a private contractor for over four years for K-12 Gallery. Yesterday, I turned my art class into a music class to the best of my ability. I wanted them to get some familiarity with some of the people who have come out of Dayton who have made music and who are famous all over the world. Most of the young people there are just not aware of it. So, there's a lot of work that needs to be done to get these facts out about exactly what the musicians here in Dayton accomplished, and to make that more of a conversation.

[Questions and answers followed; to view the session, see [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/dayton_funk_content/36/.](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/dayton_funk_content/36/)]

