

A True Music Icon, Mr. Alfie Pollitt



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When I think about Black Music Month, which is the month of June, a collage of names from the music industry flash through my mind. One of those names, is a name that is known—not just in Jazz circles from such cities as Philadel-

phia, Detroit, and Chicago, but there are also Jazz circuits abroad that know his name. The amazing Jazz artist I am referring to is Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania's own, Mr. Alfie Pollitt.

Alfie Pollitt has certainly been a well-recognized and well-respected name on the entertainment music circuit for more than five decades. Because of his years of labor in an Industry that is his passion, and for the humanitarian work and civil rights work he has done as well, who better to shine the spotlight on as we close out Black Music Month than Alfie Pollitt?

Learning his story and how he got his start in music, it was clear that—from birth, music surrounded young Alfie. He shared, “My father played Cello in a Black Symphony Orchestra called Philadelphia Concert Orchestra and my mother played violin. Her father played Coronet and Clarinet in that same orchestra. We also had a piano in the house. I'm the oldest. I started fooling around on the piano, and my father noticed. He knew a woman who lived close by who was a piano teacher, so she became my piano teacher when I was three. I don't recall exactly what age I started performing publicly, but we were very young when we were playing at social teas. Also, once a year, since my music teacher has a number of students, she would host a recital at least once a year. Those were my early days of performing in public.”

When I was in junior high school, we had a Doo-Op Group. We were singing and having fun. I was also in the choir in high school. Then I met this brother by the name of Nate Murray. Nate Murray had a band. John Coltrane's nephews were in that band. We were all contemporaries age-wise, and we loved the music, “so-called Jazz.” We devoted a lot of time practicing and jamming. We could have been out playing ball, we did that too, but we spent a lot of time developing our musical skills. John Coltrane would show his nephews some of his pieces, and they, in turn, would come back and teach us what they learned. We would do gigs here and there, and after a while, Nate Murray got us in the musicians union, and our earnings started to increase.

Let me just be blunt. As much as I enjoy jazz music, and I know a lot of people in my age group who love jazz music, whenever I've interviewed jazz musicians



Alfie Pollitt

and jazz artists over the years, they've all said something similar about the love they get overseas, as compared to here at home.

I questioned Alfie Pollitt about that. Alfie responded, “To this day, across Europe, South America, and even Asia, jazz artists get more love and more respect than here in America. Music is really respected and considered an art over there. Some American artists go over to Europe and enjoy the life there and how they're treated there, so much, that they chose to become ex-patriots. They get treated royally.”

Alfie added, “I've had some great days of traveling and entertaining overseas. When I was working with Teddy Pendergrass, we did the United Kingdom; and we also did concerts in Trinidad. We did close to ten cities in the U.K. It was us, and we were touring with Teddy and Stephanie Mills. Stephanie and Teddy had recorded on each other's albums. They were doing duets and all of that. The last show we did was Stephanie and Teddy in London and just before the last number, which was a duet between Teddy and Stephanie, all of a sudden the stage hands moved a second piano onto the stage. I was playing a white grand piano. There was also a Rhodes piano which the stage hands moved to the front of the stage, and they put a mic in front of it. Next thing I knew, Stevie Wonder was bought out on stage. They sat him down at the piano, and we played that last number together.”

How has Alfie Pollitt managed to stay grounded, kind and unjaded over the years of his journey? Pollitt com-

mented, “Several of my life experiences, being active in the Nation of Islam, and being a part of the Black Power Movement, gave me discipline. Plus, being on the road with people like Rick James and Teddy and Marvin Gaye, what I witnessed was that some people were tripping out like they were better than others. I never wanted to do that or act that way. I think because of my humbleness—that's one of the reasons I got the attention of Russell Thompson, Jr., the lead singer of the Stylistics. Back in the day. He got my phone number from somebody, and one day he called me and said, “I've been observing you for a long time. I've been studying piano on my own for

some years, and I'd like to know if you would come and be my teacher? Of course, I said yes. He ended up also being a role model for me. Russell was down to earth. He never changed up on me. He never got new on me. He's all about Black Excellence.”

Spotlighting Alfie Pollitt during Black Music Month is also poetic to me because he was part of the impetus to get Black Music Month on the map, so-to-speak. He explained, “I was blessed to be a part of the Black Music Association (BMA) when Black Music Month was birthed. We wrote a song called 'Flame of the BMA.' It was past due time for us to celebrate Black Music.”

In closing Alfie Pollitt shared, “John Coltrane was and is my number one Jazz Hero, not just in jazz, but in life.”

A more recent body of music Alfie Pollitt says he's very proud of is a song that he helped to write for Juneteenth Day called, “We Are Free, No Longer Bound.”

Mr. Alfie Pollitt, Bryn Mawr's own, but also claimed by Philadelphia, we salute you at the SCOOP USA Media Newspaper as we close out Black Music Month, 2022.

