

Sonia Sanchez to be Honored

Written by Robert ID627

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On Saturday, January 22, 2005, African Voices magazine will host an exciting evening of poetry, music and dance to honor award-winning poet/activist Sonia Sanchez for her contributions as mentor, activist and artist. African Voices' Ellie Charles Artists Award will be presented to Ms Sanchez and a special dedication will be given to beloved poet Richard Barte. Ms. Sanchez and her band will perform selections from her new CD Full Moon of Sonia, (which features some of the finest composers, musicians, and vocalists working in music today, including jazz, R&B, gospel, blues, Afro-Cuban, and hip hop); and special performances by the Wayne Cobham Quartet, Pun Jab Romain & Co. with guest vocalist Atiba Wilson, the Restoration Dance Theater and blues guitarist Ladell McLin. Howard Dodson, chief of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and Voza Rivers, founder of the Harlem Arts Alliance, will help fete the honorees. The program is a benefit for African Voices, a quarterly magazine that sponsors literary readings, conferences and other cultural events. The awards ceremony begins at 5pm at Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway at 95th Street and a private reception will be held at 8 pm at 270 W. 96th Street (bet. Broadway & West End Ave.). Tickets are \$36 or \$51 for awards ceremony and private reception. For tickets call Symphony Space at 212 864-5400 or visit www.africanvoices.com . For program information call 212 865-2982.

Affectionately known as the Poet Laureate of the Planet, Sanchez's work spans over 40 years. Her contribution to poetry is unparalleled and this latest project serves as a reminder of her impact on the oral tradition in African-American literature. A glimpse of Sanchez's full career reveals that she is the author of over 16 books including Homecoming, We a BaddDDD People, Homegirls and Handgrenades, Under a Soprano Sky, and others. She is the recipient of countless awards and honors from institutions such as the National Endowment for the Arts and the Women International League for Peace and Freedom. Her poetry has also appeared in the movie Love Jones. Sanchez has lectured at over 500 universities and colleges in the United States and has traveled the world reading her poetry in Africa, Cuba, the Caribbean, Australia, Nicaragua, and many other countries. She was also the first Presidential Fellow at Temple University where she held the Laura Carnell Chair in English until she retired in 1999.

Full Moon of Sonia, which features some of the finest composers, musicians, and vocalists working in music today, is a celebration of the life and work of Sonia Sanchez. The CD is a comprehensive music recording of her poetry, laced with smooth vocals, jazz, R&B, gospel, blues, Afro-Cuban, and hip hop.

Richard Barte is being remembered for his innovative legacy of bringing poetry and art into many uncommon places throughout the city. He was a tireless advocate of the written and Spoken Word and he was fondly known as Brooklyn's poet laureate. Barte, the author of poems, songs and slogans, among them the book, America On Our Minds in Harlem (co-authored with Jamel Carma), and the song, "Harlem Heartbeat," would ride the "D" train from the Bronx to Brooklyn, taking his poetry directly to the people. He'd recite anywhere, convincing folks that poetry indeed belonged to all of us -- selling pamphlets and chapbooks while rewarding us with stickers that read: MORE HUGGING, LESS MUGGING!, his most famous slogan, or those little cards with mirrors in them.

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A stalwart constant with the Harlem Chamber of Commerce, the Harlem Arts Alliance, and Brooklyn's Billie Holiday Theater, Bartee was ever encouraging the inclusion of poets and musicians as regular features in such annual community events as Harlem Week, Marcus Garvey Day, and the African American Day Parade, culminating in several poetry performances at the famed Apollo Theatre long before Hip Hop and Spoken Word Jams took to the stage. He was a member of SPIN, the African Heritage Caucus inside of the National Writers Union, and a member of the NWU's New York Local Steering Committee, working with many of the aforementioned activist writers in an attempt to form a Cultural Workers Union, a project that remains unfinished. Bartee died on April 7, 2003 but his work lives on in the hearts and minds of many people he touched through his poetry and ministry.

Sonia Sanchez and Rich Bartee have played special roles in African Voices history. Sanchez guest edited one of the magazine's 10th Anniversary issue and Bartee influenced African Voices to develop a literary style that showcases poetry as its centerpiece.

African Voices Ellie Charles Artists Awards is named after the organization's first chairperson Eleanor "Ellie" Charles who dedicated her life to supporting the arts, education and young people. In 1998, legendary photographer Gordon Parks became the first artist to receive African Voices' prestigious artist award. Past Ellie Award recipients are actress/activist Ruby Dee and award-winning authors Walter Mosley and Wole Soyinka, poet Amiri Baraka and actress Phyllis Yvonne Stickney.