

The California Jazz Foundation Honors Patrice Rushen



Patrice Rushen working hard in the studio. *Photo courtesy of Bob Barry*

By Shaquille Woods | April 11, 2019

IN 1982, RADIO STATIONS ACROSS THE world were blasting the bass heavy song “Forget Me Nots.” Just a decade later, Will Smith sampled the hit song for his chart topping “Men In Black” soundtrack. The mastermind behind some of music’s biggest contributions came from a woman

whose musical knowledge extends far beyond the microphone.

Patrice Rushen started her musical journey by perfecting her craft as a classically trained pianist. Those skills made her a force of nature within the music industry. Her versatility not only

as a singer, but also as a composer, writer, and producer cemented her name as one of music’s most dynamic musicians.

On Saturday April 6, the California Jazz Foundation (CJF) recently recognized those accomplishments by granting her the prestigious Nica award. The award is

given to those who exemplify the legacy of Baroness Ponnica de Koenigswarter.

Rushen, who's also a chair at the Popular Music Program at the University of Southern California, spoke to the *Los Angeles Sentinel* about her career and the drive to teach the next generation of musicians.

Los Angeles Sentinel (LS): You've had such a successful career as a talented musician. How do you carry that talent into your teaching?

Patrice Rushen (PR): I just love all the different aspects and still do. I'm still teaching, writing, performing, and touring. You kind of transfer a certain amount of energy from one thing to another. One of the increasing benefits of the various experiences I've had is how I can relate it to my musical students.

LS: Speaking of your students, what is something they have and something they could improve upon?

PR: What they have is immense talent! And they also have pretty great instincts about what they want. What they lack



Patrice Rushen is a classically trained pianist. *Photo courtesy of Bob Barry*

sometimes is the confidence to understand that if you are called as a creative or artist, this is something you must do.

LS: Can you elaborate on that?

PR: Sure. For example, you might be around a lot of people that have a particular viewpoint on artistry. They may look at it as a hobby and not a career. That's what we have to correct. Your "why" is equally

as valid as someone who wants to be a lawyer or accountant. There is a societal bias that doesn't quite understand the process. As artists we are really insecure people. That's why we play.

LS: Did you ever find yourself insecure while working in the music industry as a black woman? How did you overcome that?

PR: Well it took a while. Looking back on it now I realize how those valuable experiences helped me. I came from a community of people who were supportive. As long as I could play the instrument, they didn't care if a girl was playing. I also had support from my family. I had millions of examples of powerful women around me.

LS: What do you want your students to leave with when they finish?

PR: What they need to know is that they are part of a lineage. In order to create and expound on something, you have to understand where it came from.

You must look back before you move forward.