



Firebird Arts Alliance

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By Steven Brown

Photos by Diedra Laird

UNITED ON UNCOMMON
GROUND

'Labor of love' pulls varied talents together

*Painters and singers, pros and students
part of new cultural project*



Painting by Firebird Arts Ally:
Phillip Larrimore



(L to R) Ethel Beatty Barnes and Peppie
Calvar

Ethel Beatty Barnes feels it. By the time she climbs to the end of Duke Ellington's "I Got it Bad (And That Ain't Good)," her voice is wailing. The audience erupts.

She and the musicians backing her up performed together for the first time Sunday. She's a Broadway veteran. The keyboard player is an inductee of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland. The bass player teaches at the Northwest School of the Arts. One drummer has been playing for 45 years. The other is a student

at Northwest.

The common feature: They're all from Charlotte. They've been brought together by a fledgling cultural group led by David Tang, whose goal is just this kind of matchup.

"We all live in our own little worlds, where we're doing our own "things," Tang says...

In a television series he and WTVI-TV are planning, one episode will pair a Latin dance band and a gospel group.



Little Big Eagle plays an Invocation



David Tang

Another will match another religious group with a swing band. Every group in the series is Charlotte-based.

“What David does,” WTVI production director Eric Davis says, “is bring... this spark” that helps others share his admiration for artists in Charlotte.

Tang, a Cleveland native, came in 1996 to head the Oratorio Singers, the choral arm of the Charlotte Symphony. He masterminded the orchestra’s annual holiday program, “The Magic of Christmas.” Tang joined classics, jazz, gospel and other pieces in a seamless flow, uninterrupted by talk or applause. “Magic of Christmas” became – and remains – the orchestra’s most popular event that charges admission...

...A few months ago, [Tang] began to look at the city more closely. [He] discovered “this unbelievable wealth of artists” – from gospel singers to a Grammy-winning songwriter to Broadway veteran Barnes to



Actors, Quentin “Q” Talley and “Omar” El-Amin Sultan, of On Q Productions, perform a dramatic scene



In “Synesthesia,” different art forms come together as TJ Reddy expresses in paint the music of percussionist Jim Brock and flamenco guitarist Aris Quiroga.

creole and Cajun bands.

If he brings them together, he thinks, they can gain admirers among one another’s audiences.

There’s a method to the matchups in the TV series: The dance band Son de Cuba and the gospel group Dennis Reed and GAP, for instance, both work in styles born from music that slaves brought from Africa.

Showcased in a TV series that can be distributed to other public-TV stations, he thinks, they and the other groups will be able to introduce themselves and Charlotte to faraway viewers.

The groups are going into the studios this summer, and WTVI plans to air the series in the spring of 2008.

Firebird Arts Ally, Martha Connerton of Martha Connerton / Kinetic Works, performs a dance solo.





Dancer Cori Barnes performs to
"The Best is Yet to Come," which included students from
Northwest School of the Arts in Charlotte and the male, a cappella jazz singing group, 'Round Midnight