



# HARRIS PUBLIC RELATIONS

## Culturally Driven, Community Minded

**The Betsy's Overture to Overtown Festival Celebrates its 9th Year (Virtually)**

**In partnership with Florida International University and WDNA**

Miami, FL (September 7, 2020) - For almost a decade, The Betsy Hotel ([thebetsyhotel.com](http://thebetsyhotel.com)) has been honoring Overtown's history and its legacy through an annual interdisciplinary Festival of Jazz, poetry, and visual image. In 2020, due to COVID-19, the Festival will be virtually celebrated on four Monday nights in September with presentations at 7 PM, in partnership with [Florida International University's Miami Beach Urban Studios](#) (FIU-MBUS), the [City of Miami Beach](#), [WDNA](#), [Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau](#), [Arts and Business Council Miami](#), [South Florida Cares Mentoring Movement](#), [Miami Jazz Cooperative](#), [Diaspora Vibe Cultural Arts Incubator](#), Miami Jazz Cooperative, Harris Public Relations, and other partners. The Betsy's Overture to Overtown 2020 online festival program will feature eleven performing jazz artists, four poets, and five scholars focused on keeping the Overtown aura alive through sharing its history, legacy, and future promise. Audiences are invited to prepare for a truly immersive experience. RSVP to all events here <https://www.thebetsyhotel.com/calendar>

During its heyday, Overtown was often referred to as 'the Harlem of the South', because its story is akin to that of NY's Harlem – and on the National Jazz circuit, musicians often played in both Harlems, as they made their way from one club to another, playing for audiences around the country. In Overtown, stars like Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Lena Horne, Louis Armstrong, and Josephine Baker performed and spent the night because of segregation laws in Miami and Miami Beach. Unable to stay the night after a gig, they went "over town" to their hotels and stayed in hotels owned and operated by Black proprietors. The talents of so many cultural 'greats' fostered such world-class

entertainment venues in Overtown as the Lyric Theater, Knight Beat, and other clubs. Over the years, distinguished African American intellectuals also stayed there, including W.E.B. Dubois, author Zora Neale Hurston, and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X frequented the area, and so did Muhammed Ali, as did so many other great African American voices.

*“At The Betsy Hotel, we have a passion for building community through the arts in ways that I believe cannot be achieved through a standard approach and working with Carole Ann Taylor as a community curator and project strategist made this year's program planning experience richer than ever before. Beyond that, we've had the support of pillar institutions, the civil sector, government, and small businesses, all working together in a very intentional way to tell this important story and to make real music, because to quote Duke Ellington, ‘there is no music without intention.’ Everyone has worked exceedingly hard to help put this together to be sure that Overtown’s legacy is appropriately remembered and honored.”*, said Deborah Briggs, co-curator of Overtown to Overture and Vice President of the Arts Program at The Betsy Hotel.

The work of legacy Overtown poets will be celebrated through recitations of poems written by WEB Dubois, Langston Hughes, and Muhammed Ali – presented by Geoffrey Philp, the project's Community Poet in Residence. Poets: Octavia Yearwood, Marcus Blake, and Butterfly will also appear. Participating jazz musicians include Roxana Amed, Tom Lippincott, James Ousley, Carole Ann Taylor, LaVie, Brenda Alford, Nikki Kidd, Wendy Pedersen, Nicole Yarling, Jim Gasior, Melton Mustafa, Jr, LeNard Rutledge, and Allen Paul. During the closing moments of each event, historic photographs of Overtown Jazz Greats will be shared from the recent publication, Sounds of Freedom (2019), selected by Miami-based *artist-ivist* Leonor Anthony, alongside archival images provided to the project by The Black Archive, at the direction of Dr. Dorothy Fields.

Events will be carried live into patron's homes via Zoom and Facebook Live. To ensure audio excellence, musical performances will be pre-recorded at @thebetsyhotel while poets and scholars will appear live. Each event will allow time for audience Q&A.

### (Virtual) Events Overview

**September 7, 2020 @ 7 PM**

#### **The Place "Over Town"**

**With special guest Dr. Dorothy Fields**, Founder of The Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida

Born in Overtown, Dr. Fields has devoted her life to preserving the African-American community's heritage and raising awareness of African-American history to a national level.

**September 14, 2020 @ 7 PM**

### **What happened in/to Overtown?**

**With special guest Timothy Barber**, Executive Director, The Black Archives Historic Lyric Theater

Born and raised in Miami, Mr. Barber has served in his position since 2009, has been an adjunct professor at Florida Memorial University, and is the visionary behind emerging community-building programs at the historic Lyric Theater in Overtown.

**September 21, 2020**

### **Lessons Learned**

**With special guest Dr. Marvin Dunn**, Faculty member at FIU, Department of Psychology, founder and director of Roots (an Overtown urban gardening program) is also founded the Academy for Community Education (later re-named Dr. Marvin Dunn Academy for Community Education), a Miami-Dade County high school for at-risk youth in the Miami Dade County Public Schools. Dr. Dunn is the author of Black Miami in the 20th Century (University Press of Florida, 2016)

**September 28, 2020**

### **Overtown Rising**

With special guests -

**Mr. Neil Shiver, Esq**, Executive Director of the Southeast Overtown / Park West Community Redevelopment Agency. South Florida native, Cornelius "Neil" Shiver has over 20 years of experience in law, business management, public policy, and community development – and was appointed to his position in 2018

**Dr. Graylyn Swilley-Woods** is the Executive Director of the Overtown Children and Youth Coalitions. She is also a Senior Consultant for Multicultural Tourism Initiatives and recent past Associate Vice President of Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau Multicultural Tourism Department, Business and Education

Division. Mrs. Woods spent more than a decade promoting the development and advancement of Multicultural Tourism in Greater Miami and Beaches.

For an overview of the program <https://www.thebetsyhotel.com/overture-to-overtown>

### **About the principal presenting partners – and the program**

The Betsy and the FIU College of Communication, Architecture + The Arts | Miami Beach Urban Studios were the first cultural presenters in Miami Dade County to convene and present a virtual salon series in response to 'stay at home' mandates necessitating the cancellation of live events. Located just a few blocks apart in Miami Beach, Florida, these two partners have co-presented hundreds of live events in the past decade, featuring visionary thinkers, performers, and makers. As of Mid-August, more than 1750 households have joined a new community of global arts appreciators that have come together to find moments of contemplation and calm during these troubling times of COVID-19 isolation.

The Overture to Overtown series brings online a nine-year commitment by The Betsy Hotel to an annual festival commemorating 'where it all started' with South Florida Jazz so many years ago. For FIU MBUS, their partnership for these event champions next-generation jazz musicians studying in the FIU School of Music @ FIU on their way to promising careers as jazz educators and performers. Many performers in this series are graduates/faculty in FIU's jazz program - and are regular performers in The Betsy Hotel's 7 night a week jazz program.

The Betsy-South Beach (@thebetsyhotel) is a luxury boutique hotel located on Ocean Drive, boasting a globally regarded arts and culture program for the past decade. The Betsy is also the home of Live Jazz (7 nights a week) on Miami Beach, SWWIM (Supporting Women Writers in Miami), O, Miami Poetry Festival, Miami Classical Music Festival, and the founding corporate sponsor for Reading Queer, TransCon, Yiddishkayt Initiative, and TransArt. The Betsy has hosted more than 1,000 artists in an artist residency program ([thebetsywritersroom.com](http://thebetsywritersroom.com)), and its nine art galleries are open to the public. The Betsy Hotel is owned and operated by the Plutzik Goldwasser family.

The Miami Beach Urban Studios at Florida International University (@FIUMBUS) is a collider for people and ideas in arts, design, technology, and the sciences. Headquartered on iconic Lincoln Road in Miami Beach, MBUS, a Cultural Anchor in the City of Miami Beach generously supported by the Miami Beach Cultural Arts Council and with over 150 events each year, is a creative space for students and the community in the heart of one of the most vibrant artistic urban centers in the world. John Stuart is the Executive Director.

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