



In 2009, Marquis Strauther was beginning to find his stride in music. He struggled with daily issues of school and life, but his high school music instructor saw improvement. The instructor approached Strauther about the James T. and Lavinia Murray Scholarship at Walker West Music Academy in Saint Paul. Eventually, Strauther was granted the scholarship and began training in the French horn under the tutelage of Felix James. Lessons offered respite from life issues, and helped Strauther develop a passion for music.

Strauther is now a graduate of Saint Paul Central High School, and current student at McNally Smith College of Music in Saint Paul. His dream is to become a music instructor, and provide unconditional support in leading students to success. Strauther said he is grateful to Walker West Music Academy for the opportunity. He is especially moved by the instruction that not only taught him fundamentals of playing a musical instrument, but improved his well being. Strauther said, “these teachers care that we have success. It is more than just a job. In regular school I felt under pressure by better students. Walker West is great because it has given me a chance to prove I can be so much better --like some of the people I idolize or look up to.”

Strauther is a success story that will be celebrated amongst many others at the James T. & Lavinia Murray Scholarship Fund and Walker West Music Academy Anniversary Fundraiser, “Honor the History, Ensure the Future” on Saturday, August 7, 2010, from 3-5:00 pm at Wilder Center Auditorium, on 451 Lexington Parkway N., St. Paul. The event will feature performances by Wenso Ashby featuring Zsame, The West Bros., Reverend Walker & Faculty, Walker West Music Academy students, and KMOJ’s Q Bear and Miss Georgia will emcee the event.

For community leader Mary K. Murray Boyd, daughter of James T. & Lavinia Murray, there is nothing more important than continuing her father’s legacy of caring and supporting the successful development of all children, and especially youth who may not have exposure to benefits of music education. Boyd said of her father, “he had given to community through his music. There was such a connection with what Rev. Walker and Grant West were doing in starting Walker West Music Academy 20 plus years ago in the community that would make music available to people in that community, that was really very unusual. That was the love of the community. My mother and father had that same passion for the community, children and music. So it was really like shared dreams.”

There is hope that Walker West will continue to produce the likes of James T. Murray through

Walker – Murray

Written by Maya Beecham

the support of community. Murray was an internationally acclaimed singer with a full-bodied baritone voice that could sing in German, Swedish and Latin. He performed across the world in the production of *Porgy* and *Bess* where he shared the stage with celebrities such as Dr. Maya Angelou. He was known for his riveting rendition of “Old Man River” from the production of *Showboat*

. Music opened many doors of opportunity for Murray, but he and his wife Lavinia were known for being true pillars in the Rondo Community. Murray dreamed of scholarships being made available to children for music lessons.

Fifteen years after his death, Boyd is committed to the scholarship fund in the name of her parents that is saving children’s lives through music. The James T. and Lavinia Murray Scholarship Fund was created by Boyd as an endowment fund within the Pan African Community Endowment of Saint Paul Foundation dedicated to the sole purpose of Walker West Music Academy student scholarships. Half of the proceeds from the James T. and Lavinia Murray and Walker West Music Academy Anniversary Fundraiser will be divided into the endowment fund for future access, and the other half will be available immediately for Walker West scholarships.

Walker West Music Academy was founded in 1989 by Reverend Carl Walker and Grant West, located in the historic Rondo Community of Saint Paul at 777 Selby Avenue, and to date is one of the oldest arts organizations in the nation of its kind. The organization operates with a two-fold goal that reads, “to preserve African American styles of music by teaching jazz, gospel and blues among other genres and to keep music education accessible to students.”

As professional musicians, members of the contemporary jazz group Wenso Ashby featuring Zsame, understand the value of music in children’s overall development and well being. They stressed the importance of supporting a community institution like Walker West Music Academy for the livelihood of children and the world. And the connection it gives its students to music that exposes them to a whole new world. Group members are challenging the community and musicians specifically to meet or exceed the group’s donation of \$100 towards Walker West Music Academy. Ashby said, “make an effort to come out and support Walker West. Saving a kid may save the world.” His counterpart Zsame said, “it is imperative for us to help each other. What we do or don’t do will affect the outcome of this world.”

For more information on the James T. and Lavinia Murray Scholarship Fund and Walker West Music Academy Fundraiser, visit www.walkerwestmusicacademy.org or call (651) 224-2929.