

Sule' Neal

In October of 2020, my friend Sule' Neal passed away. Way back in the 1970s, we played together in a band called Kuumba, by 1980, we had changed the name to the Sun Messengers. He was about four years older than me, so he'd already been out there, was more seasoned. He'd played with Sam Sanders and Visions, one of the leading jazz groups in Detroit. We were lucky to have him.

His father Harold Neal was a very well regarded Detroit artist. Jazz was in his house. Roy Brooks and other leading Detroit jazz musicians would congregate there. Sule' told me that his earliest memories as a baby, he would lay in the crib and listen to jazz after mom fed him, the music nourished him. He said it made him feel quiet and cool.

He told me that after Motown left Detroit; the Metropolitan Arts Complex came about. This is where he met Marcus Belgrave, Sam Sanders, Jimmy Allen, Ed Pickens, Beans Bowels, back in 1972. They became his mentors.

Drummers Jimmy Allen and Roy Brooks were Sule's greatest influences and he and would play with Roy's Aboriginal Percussion Choir.

Sule' played drums at the Shrine of the Black Madonna Choir for 18 years!

In 2018 we released a 40-year reunion CD from our days with Kuumba. I am proud that we could document the music that we had made together all those years ago, AND, it was thrilling to perform again with him. We did a sold-out concert at the Scarab Club, opened up for the Griot Galaxy at the Concert of Colors, we performed at the Jazzin at the River Festival and at Motor City Wine. It was great to get the old gang back together as you can see by the photos. He was loved and respected.

This man had an incredible spark! He survived Covid-19 to find out he had cancer. I am grateful for the conversations that we had at the end. Rest in peace my musical brother. I learned a lot from you. You were a blessing in my life.

Harold L. Neal II aka Sule' "the Adventurous Leader" April 16, 1952 to October 30, 2020

RJ Spangler

November  
2020