

## Talent is Color Blind

**Lauderdale by The Sea, FL.** – When a story is so big, it is hard to determine where it should begin and from what perspective. I would like to consider this chapter one in sharing a movement in art that was created by Florida's famed "Highwaymen". This highwaymen's movement in art began in the 1950's with Alfred Hair, he was the nucleus of a group of nine artists (Harold Newton, Alfred Hair, Roy McLendon, James Gibson, Livingston Roberts, Mary Ann Carroll, Sam Newton, Willie Daniels, and Al Black) that came together for the betterment of their lives. Hair studied art with A.E. "Bean" Backus a known landscape painter in Fort Pierce, FL. This is of note because the BLACK artists during the 1950's had to abide by Jim Crow laws and these laws did not allow them to showcase their work in galleries and museums, let alone go to art school to be formally taught.

The group later grew to a unit of twenty-five men and one woman. The highwaymen could see that by working as artists they could make more money from painting than working in the orange groves or packing houses. Why work all day long for five dollars, a painting could get twenty-five or thirty dollars for thirty to forty-five minutes of labor? That would be equal to a weeks worth of wages or more of manual labor from the sale of one painting. Their landscapes were often noted as fantasy landscapes because of the vivid use of color. The highwaymen painted the landscapes from how they experienced the landscapes. Kelvin Hair (second generation Highwayman) son of Alfred Hair shared with me the true essence of the paintings. He described it as raw unbridled emotion.

It keeps echoing in the back of my mind on how they lived in a time period of huge adversity and separatism but they were also marketing and sales experts. They definitely had a great formula to sell to people from everywhere and all walks of life despite the racial inequalities presented to them. They found an essence that touches all souls through their brushes painting Florida's historic landscape.

In 2004, the 26 original Florida Highwaymen were inducted into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame. The Highwaymen are credited for encouraging the beginning of the "Indian River School" and "Backus" art movements. Today their original works command top dollar, adorn the walls of the White House, Florida's governors mansion and are in demand among art collectors. I had a chance to interview the highwaymen and experience the art at "Frame 'n Art by the Sea" in Lauderdale-by-the-sea. The shop was showcasing their art and promoting their upcoming major feature film, The Unknowns – Talent is Color Blind. The film, is produced by Top Cat II Productions LLC and starring actress Whoopi Goldberg.

"We are doing this event to honor the original Highwaymen for their accomplishments in not only being acclaimed artists, but also for their efforts in knocking down racial barriers that could have blocked their talent and kept them forever unknown. We are also doing it to honor those original Highwaymen who are no longer with us, as well as the talented art teacher, Zanobia Jefferson, who discovered young Hair's talent more than



They worked together as a group painting intuitively without use of sketches or photographs. Art was a way of supporting their families and keeping food their tables. They would sometimes have as many as twenty boards nailed on the wall at one time to start the production of paintings. These oil paintings were created on Upson board and framed with crown moldings. Often they were sold wet and definitely were created fast, this made it so that no two paintings could be the same and inventory would be high.

60 years ago and took him to meet Backus," said Walter Shaw, producer of The Unknowns – Talent is Color Blind.

Production is scheduled to begin in Savannah, GA sometime in March 2016. Shaw noted that Georgia had the film credits that helped put the film in production whereas Florida was not able to assist. Shaw is passionate to tell the Highwaymen story and put it on the Silver Screen for all to know the history of an American Art Movement that preserved the landscapes of Florida because of adversity.

Al Black was the salesman of the group and he would sell all that was available along the eastern coast of Florida down the A1A and Highway 1. Black shared with me that he would often touch up the paintings and later became very active in joining the rest of his fellow artisans in creating works of art. They charged \$25 to \$35 for each framed piece, making it possible for Floridians and tourists, who normally didn't buy original art, to own their own affordable oil paintings. The artwork was sold to banks, motels, doctors and lawyers offices, restaurants, businesses and the general public throughout Florida. They never thought they would be famous and authorship was put aside in order to sell, this would lead to many paintings unsigned until the time of sale. 200,000 paintings over a span of 40 years were created.

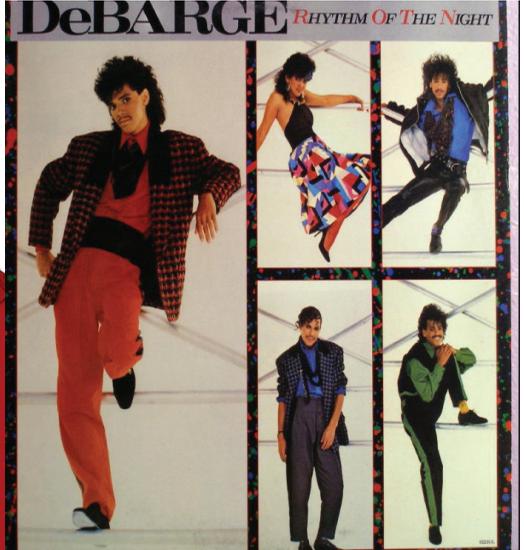
Learn about the film visit :[www.theunknownsmovietalentiscolorblind.com](http://www.theunknownsmovietalentiscolorblind.com)  
Learn about the Highwaymen visit: <http://www.floridahighwaymenpaintings.com>

This would mean that the group average from as many as 30 paintings per month, per artist, would produce a body of work greater than 7600 paintings in a lifetime. If we look at the history of art it would mean that each artist created more works than Van Gogh, Monet, and Renoir combined as an individual. Beyond labor and materials, what determines the value of a painting? There are many answers but certainly an appraiser would definitely agree to the historic value, the artist, and the materials. The Highwaymen painted Florida's landscape. It is the old Florida, beaches, big skies, flora, fauna, trees and waterscapes.



**Artists of all ages have a message to share in helping eradicate this epidemic that is affecting our community. Broward County has the highest AIDS Rates in the USA!**

**ART ON AIDS/HIV**



**Bobby DeBarge**  
(March 5, 1956 – August 16, 1995)

As a member of the famous DeBarge family, Robert Louis "Bobby" DeBarge, Jr. was the lead singer of the Motowns 70's group "Switch" he was noted for his impressive falsetto vocals. After nearly a decade together, DeBarge abruptly left the group in 1983, and continued his work overseeing his siblings' albums. A former boyfriend of LaToya Jackson, DeBarge confided to his family that he had contracted AIDS from intravenous drug use. He fell ill in 1995 and was admitted to a hospice where he stayed until his death at 39 in August of that year from AIDS complications. SOURCE: HipHopWired.com