

“Gordon Parks Choice of Weapons Award” 2023 Recipients

Tommy Dodson, Mario E. Sprouse and Deborah Willis will be the recipients of the “Gordon Parks Choice of Weapons Award” at the annual celebration October 5th -7th, 2023 in Fort Scott, Kansas. The celebration is in honor Fort Scott native Gordon Parks, noted photographer, writer, musician, and filmmaker. The Choice of Weapons Award was established in Parks’ honor to be given annually at the celebration.

Tommy Dodson, is a musician, composer, author, and photographer who has enjoyed a wonderful 50 year long career in music. At thirteen years of age, he wrote “You Don’t Know How Much I Love You.” He recorded it with his local combo band in a Kansas City recording studio and formally released it on his own label, Dodson Records, at Williams Music Store in his hometown, Fort Scott, Kansas where he sold numerous copies. Tommy toured with his band southeast Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.

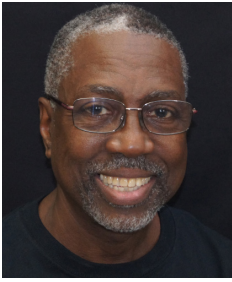


Dodson relocated to Los Angeles at age 17. He signed a management contract with Mus-Art Corporation who was able to land a recording contract for him with Capitol Records where he recorded “Cooperate” which was released on a subsidiary, “Main Sound Records.” Soon after, Mus-Art contracted Tommy with the Las Vegas Revue “Funky Soul” as one of the headliners of that show. At the show’s conclusion, he returned to LA and started studying at California State University majoring in music. At 18, he was drafted into the US Army during the Vietnam War which ended his contract with Capitol since he was then unable to perform live. While in the military he entertained often in the NCO club on base. After an honorable discharge from the army, he returned to LA and continued to entertain in local clubs and venues while resuming studies at Cal State LA.

Along the way Mr. Dodson developed an interest in nature photography with a special interest in macro photography. He studied under noted California photographers and has had his work appear in *Better Homes and Gardens*, *A Manual of California Vegetation*, *Reader’s Digest* and more. He has worked as a staff photographer with Turning Point magazine, a local California publication featuring events and personalities in and about the Black community.

From 1997 to 2001 Mr. Dodson entertained and traveled around the world on the Crystal Cruise lines. In 1998 and 2000 he did world cruises on the Crystal Symphony. He’s composed music for three musicals: *Booze, Blues and Attitude*; *David and Jonathan*; and *Playing the Game*.

In 2014, Mr. Dodson relocated to Palm Springs, where he continues to entertain at local musical venues. In 2014, he was a finalist for the McCallum Theater’s annual review, *Open Call*. He’s written one novel, *Washed in the Blood* and is currently working on a second. Mr Dodson has been creating monthly videos on YouTube entitled “From My Heart to You” and his purpose with those is to spread love through his voice and music. His lifelong motto has always been “Love is the answer.”



Mario E. Sprouse, has been working in music, theater and film for well over 50 years. He is a graduate of The City College of New York, B.A. Music Composition and Theory. Since 1991 Mr. Sprouse has been the Arts Ministry Coordinator for Marble Collegiate Church, and an Associate Director for Marble Vision, the media ministry of Marble since 1996.

Mr. Sprouse was the Music Supervisor for three films of the legendary Gordon Parks and his musical assistant for over 20 years. *Moments Without Proper Names*, *Martin* – a film ballet and the Emmy-nominated HBO documentary *Half-Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks*. He also produced Mr. Parks' first CD of original classical music created to accompany his book *A Star for Noon*. Mr. Sprouse is a member of the Board of Directors of the Gordon Parks Foundation, and is currently working on a project with the Colour of Music Festival of Black Classical Musicians, to bring the classical music of Gordon Parks to international prominence.

Mr. Sprouse provided musical arrangements for several short films and was the music supervisor, composer, and arranger for the critically acclaimed documentary film *Art Bastard* which chronicles the life of artist Bob Cenedella. Mr. Sprouse has been musical director for a number of theatrical events, including “Black Nativity – a Gospel Song Play”, “Lena Calhoun Horne – the Civil Rights Journey of a Negro Woman” In 2020 Mr. Sprouse received an AUDELCO Award for Outstanding Musical Direction for “The Dark Star from Harlem – the Spectacular Rise of Josephine Baker”.

Carmen McRae, Hubert Laws, Cornell Dupree, Buster Williams, Freddie Hubbard and Grover Washington, Jr. are some of the jazz artists who have recorded his musical arrangements. Orchestrations and original songs written by Mr. Sprouse have been performed live by Gregory Hines and Phylicia Rashad.

Mr. Sprouse is the author of *Precious & Honored – a Spiritual Handbook for Artists*. In 2022, he was named a Visionary of The Foundation for Spirituality and the Arts.



Deborah Willis, Ph.D, is University Professor and Chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. She has affiliated appointments with the College of Arts and Sciences, Department of Social & Cultural Analysis and the Institute of Fine Arts, where she teaches courses on Photography & Imaging, iconicity, and cultural histories visualizing the black body, women, and gender. She is the director of NYU's Center for Black Visual Culture/Institute of African American Affairs. Her research examines photography's multifaceted histories, visual culture, the photographic history of Slavery and Emancipation, contemporary women photographers, and beauty.

*Photo provided by
Laylah Amatullah Barryan*

She is the author of *The Black Civil War Soldier: A Visual History of Conflict and Citizenship* and *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present*, among others. Dr. Willis' curated exhibitions include: “Framing Moments in the KIA” (Kalamazoo Institute of the Arts), “Home: Reimagining Interiority” at YoungArts Gallery, and “Free as they want to be: Artists Committed to Memory” at FotoFocus.

Dr. Willis was awarded the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellowship and was a Richard D. Cohen Fellow in African and African American Art, Hutchins Center, Harvard University; a John Simon Guggenheim Fellow, an Alphonse Fletcher, Jr. Fellow and recipient of the Don Tyson Prize for the Advancement of American Art. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and was named the Mary Lucille Dauray Artist-in-Residence by the Norton Museum of Art.

Schedule and ticket information will be posted at a later date on the website gordonparkscenter.org.