

In Loving Memory of



Donal Richard Leace

May 6, 1939 - November 21, 2020



Memorial Service

4:00 PM

February 6, 2021

Obituary

Donal Richard Leace, singer/songwriter, educator, civil rights advocate and world traveler, passed away from COVID-19, on November 21, 2020. David Pitts, author/journalist, said “Don(al) is quite simply an American treasure whose music speaks to all the world”.

Donal was born on May 6, 1939 in Huntington, West Virginia to Antoinette and Nathan Leace. He came of age in Philadelphia, and moved to New York City in 1959, where his skills and passion as a singer-guitarist developed. He earned his undergraduate degree at Howard University in Washington, DC, where he served as President of the Howard Players. Donal earned graduate degrees from Georgetown University and George Washington University; he was also honored as both a Fulbright Scholar and US Presidential Scholar.

During the 60’s Donal was known as “Washington’s Favorite Folk Singer”, working for over nine years at the famed Cellar Door in Georgetown. Over the years he performed with many of the musical greats, including John Denver, Odetta, Nina Simone, Judy Collins, Ramsey Lewis, Keter Betts, and Emmylou Harris; as well as comedians Dick Gregory, Bill Cosby and Richard Pryor. Donal recorded for Franc, Gateway, JBL and Atlantic Records, touring nationally with Nancy Wilson and internationally with Roberta Flack. He recorded his first album “Donal Leace” in 1972, and later released CDs “Leace on Life” in 1992 and “Leace Renewed” followed in 2002. Donal’s music inspired many, including Kanye West, who sampled “Today Won’t Come Again” on his 2005 hit, “Hey Mama”.

Donal was deeply committed to the Washington theater community. For many years, Donal served as Chair of the Drama Department at the Ellington School of the Arts, Washington, DC, where he taught and mentored young artists including Dave Chappelle and Denyce Graves. Among his many contributions, Donal served as a judge for the Washington Theater Awards Society’s Helen Hayes Awards.

In 2000 Donal was named to the Washington Area Music Awards Hall of Fame and was inducted into the Washingtonian Magazine’s “Washington Music Hall of Fame” in 2003.

Donal leaves to cherish his memory: his lifelong friend and former wife, Jakki Browner; siblings Myra Carter, Scheli Leace and Sheldon Leace; cousins, C. Michael Gray, Olivia Stewart, Oneida Lacey; godson, Josh Dow; goddaughter, Marie Mann Bibbs; and a host of relatives, friends and former students.

Final arrangements were handled by Local Cremation and Funerals, and he will be interred at Forest Lawn Memory Gardens in Huntington, WV. In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions to the Donal Leace Endowment at The Duke Ellington School of the Arts, 3500 R Street, NW Washington, DC 20007.

Celebration of Life for Donal Leace

Order of Service

Welcome		Jakki Browner
Tribute		David Pitts
Musical Selection	Esther Williams & Davey Yarborough	
Reflections		Scheli Leace Myra Carter Olivia and Ed Steward
In His Words	<i>“Sunshine”</i>	Donal Leace
Reflections		Mason Gray Courtney Gray Josh Dow Marie Bibbs
In His Words	<i>“Daddy Is A Coming”</i>	Donal Leace
Tribute		Roberta Flack
Proclamation		Mayor Muriel Bowser Washington D.C. read by Sandi Logan
Reflections		Sen. Cheryl Kagan Doris Justis and Sean McGhee Geoffrey Newman Gary Bowden Eileen Horan Joyce Romanus Terry Jackson

