

INSPIRE

Jillean and Joe Williams: Imparting a Jazz Legacy to the Next Generation



JILLEAN AND JOE WILLIAMS



JOE WILLIAMS



JILLEAN WILLIAMS

A long-time member of the Las Vegas community and a person well-known to many in that city's entertainment field, Jillean Williams has now left yet another legacy—this time through UNCF.

Jillean was born and grew up overseas, in England. She served as a member of the Women's Army Corps during World War II. Following the war, Jillean worked for the P&O shipping line and later moved to New York City. While in New York, she started working with a management consulting company in Rockefeller Center.

In the early 1960s, Jillean married Joseph Goreed Williams, a jazz musician singing as just "Joe Williams" with the great Count Basie Orchestra. For those who know their music, Joe Williams was, and remains, one of the legendary voices of jazz.

Joe Williams performed in concert and on record with such stars as Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, George Shearing, Nancy Wilson, Marlena Shaw, Mel Tormé and with celebrated blues shouters Jimmy Rushing and Big Joe Turner. Joe appeared frequently on national TV programs such as the "Tonight Show with Johnny Carson," the "Perry Como Show," and had a supporting role in the Bill Cosby comedies."

Joe won a multitude of awards, including a Grammy® in 1985 for his recording "Nothing But The Blues," and was given "The Ella" by the Society of Singers—previous recipients having been Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra. He was also invited to perform in the White House by both Presidents Nixon and Clinton.

And, it was that love of jazz that sparked the love between Jillean and Joe Williams. In 1997, Joe and Jillean created the Joe Williams Every Day Foundation, providing jazz scholarships at colleges across the country, encouraging more students to enter the field. Joe once said, "We've got to reach down and help those on the way up." The Foundation continues to provide students with instrument training; composition and arranging; singing and voice training; and first promotional recordings.

As a final way to share their joy over the music they both so loved and to ensure more sweet jazz, through her estate, Jillean Williams created the Joe Williams Music Scholarship Fund at UNCF to provide tuition grants to students studying music. Just like the scholarships from their foundation, this new scholarship is meant to encourage students to enter the field of music.

The Williams' gift plants an important seed, inspiring future generations to deliver stirring rhythms, deep bass and even the blues, well known to musicians of all stripes—particularly jazz singers.