



Giant steps

By: David Winzelberg

February 19, 2016

To developers, a rundown farm ranch on a nearly 3.5-acre lot in Dix Hills seemed like an opportunity for a profitable subdivision.

But to those who had a hand in preserving the parcel, the property once owned by an iconic American couple instead stands as a symbol of cultural creativity and represents a unique instrument to help spread the gospel of originality, diversity and understanding to future generations.

Vacant for several years and in need of serious repairs, the unassuming brick house on Candlewood Path once owned by music legends John and Alice Coltrane was what real estate speculators call a knockdown. In fact, that's exactly where it was headed 13 years ago.

While John Coltrane only lived in the Dix Hills house for three years before his death from liver cancer in 1967 at age 40, the internationally regaled saxophonist and composer wrote one of his most heralded works "A Love Supreme" in its basement studio. His second wife Alice Coltrane, an accomplished jazz pianist and harpist in her own right, continued to reside in the home with her daughter and three sons until they moved to California in 1972.

The house and its mostly wooded property was sold to a new owner in 1982 for \$75,000 and was purchased by developers Bruce Acker and Ashok Agrawal 20 years later for \$500,000. Twelve months after that, the spec builders tried to flip a 1.04-acre portion of the property for \$499,000. The special conditions on the August 2003 listing read: “seller will remove existing house.”

However, another Dix Hills homeowner and Coltrane fan Steve Fulgoni saved the house from the bulldozer, convincing the Town of Huntington to buy the entire property, which it did in November 2005 for \$975,000. Fulgoni was successful in getting the house added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2007, eight years after Coltrane’s earlier home in Philadelphia was designated a national historic landmark.

Though overgrown brush has been cleared around the house on Candlewood Path and there’s been some mold remediation on the inside, most of the building has largely sat untouched. But in the last few weeks there’s been plenty of activity at the home as workers are in the midst of an extensive restoration directed by The Coltrane Home nonprofit group founded by Fulgoni that seeks to turn it into a museum and discovery center. Medford-based All Island Cleaning, owned by Stephen Cubells, has been pulling down mold-damaged sheetrock, while saving original trim and cataloging the home’s interior. Cubells has donated much of his time on the project, doing a lot of the work for free or at minimal rates.

While fundraising for the home’s restoration has been challenging, the effort has so far relied on construction industry assistance, reaching out to tradesmen like Cubells to move things forward.

“We’ve gotten this far because of their generosity,” said Ron Stein, president of The Coltrane Home. He estimates it will likely cost about \$1.5 million to \$2 million to realize the vision of the home as a museum and music technology learning center. Stein is hoping to open a temporary visitor site there early next year and is aiming to establish permanent operation in 2018.

There’s a lot of work left to do before that happens. Fulgoni said the house is still in need of mechanical systems to provide heat and water before it’s fully functioning.

“If we can get the word out to more contractors, we can get it done,” he said.

Besides the help from construction firms, The Coltrane Home has the backing of several prominent musicians, some of whom gathered at a benefit brunch event in Manhattan in October 2014. Those rallying to support the cause included Carlos Santana, Wynton Marsalis, Cornel West, Jimmy Heath and Elvis Costello. Santana, West and Heath also serve on the organization’s honorary board. Coltrane’s son Ravi, also an accomplished jazz saxophonist, is the group’s chairman.

Restoring the Coltrane home is just one part of the nonprofit’s goal. Another, and perhaps more wide-ranging, is the outreach campaign dubbed the Coltrane Legacy Education Project. The effort is aimed at developing programs for schools and local communities to encourage active participation in music making, creativity and personal expression, while expanding music appreciation of jazz, artists like the Coltranes and diverse musical cultures.



“It’s recognizing the importance of music education, particularly at a time when music and art programs are being cut back in schools,” Stein said.

So far, two pilot workshops are offered—one for students from 5- to 8-years old and another for ages 11-18—that focus on music expression and its creative process. Teacher education workshops, music scholarship programs and a summer camp are on the drawing board.

Another byproduct of The Coltrane Home’s campaign is an annual music festival, the first of which debuted in Huntington’s Heckscher Park last July. The event, which drew nearly 3,000 people, featured a performance by Ravi Coltrane and other popular acts, such as Long Island’s own Funk

Filharmonik, and engaged young musicians in workshops and performances throughout the day. A second Coltrane musicfest is again slated for July this year and may be spread over two days this time, Stein says.

“There’s nothing that brings people together for a positive purpose than music,” Stein said.

Meanwhile, the organization is seeking corporate sponsorships and enlisting area businesses to help advance its mission.

“It’s going to take a lot of hands joined together to realize the vision,” Stein said. “It’s important in raising the attractiveness of Long Island, particularly for young families. Music tradition is as strong here as anywhere else and businesses want to retain and attract those young people.”

A former engineer, Fulgoni is now a music retailer, owning a shop called The Instrument Store in Deer Park. Inspired by Coltrane, he plays sax as a hobby and gives credit to Huntington officials for stepping up to save the Dix Hills property.

“Eleven years ago, I didn’t know where this was going to go,” Fulgoni said.

Huntington Councilwoman Susan Berland, who sponsored the resolution for the town to buy the property, said its represents much more than a house.

“It represents jazz and the contributions Coltrane has made to the world of music,” Berland said. “I thought it would be a tragedy if the house was lost.”

Tracey Edwards, a fellow town councilwoman, agreed that the effort involves much more than just a building.

“For me, it goes well beyond the house. It’s not just about black history, it’s about Huntington history,” she said. “It’s about allowing all of that culture and history to help all of our kids.”



To assist in the effort and to get more information go to www.thecoltranehome.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Read more: <http://libn.com/2016/02/19/giant-steps/#ixzz44A5ZtFki>

2 COMMENTS

1.



Steve finkslstein

February 22, 2016 at 12:22 am

What a worthy cause! Kudos to Mr. Fulgoni i and Mr. Stein and the town of Huntington for having the vision and political will to preserve such an important piece of property. Not only is it important to preserve the history of this property and of coal trains contribution to American and world culture, it's also critical for music educators and students of all ages to grasp the importance of music education above and beyond grades in school and notes on the printed page. This is also about the expression of love and compassion through the creation and expression of improvised art, an aspect of music education and education in general which is sorely lacking these days

2.



mike taricone

February 22, 2016 at 11:31 am

as a kid, I first heard John's soprano sax via my transistor am radio. On July 2015, I had a great day of music, hearing Mala Waldron and Ravi lead quartets and joining the community jam session on drums for Chameleon and Mercy, Mercy, Mercy! Look forward to 2016 at the Rainbow stage.....