

Walker

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KW: I learned so much about you from the film. For instance, I was surprised to hear that Howard Zinn had been a professor of yours in college.

AW: He was already teaching at Spelman when I arrived as a freshperson. Then, I took his class the following year, because I had gone to the Soviet Union and wanted to learn more about Russia, and I think he was the only person in all of Atlanta who knew anything about Russian literature, which I loved. He was teaching Russian literature, the language, and some of the politics. We became really good friends when I took his class, but then he was fired.

The point about the color purple is just that to really see a color is so remarkable! Anything that you can see that is beautiful is a gift. Blue... green... black... yellow... All these colors are amazing.

KW: For doing more than just teaching.

AW: He helped us desegregate Atlanta. That was moving because he took a lot of abuse for that. He and Staughton Lynd, a fellow professor who was also from the North, stood with us. They were certainly behind us. In fact, they often stood in front of us. This had a huge impact on me. But

one of the reasons I was very careful about speaking about the relationship I had with him and Staughton was because, in a racist society, if you acknowledge a deep love for and a deep debt owed to white teachers, they tend to discredit your own parents and your own community. And I was very unhappy about that because I come from somewhere and from specific black people in the South, including my parents, who built our first school, and rebuilt it after it was burned to the ground. And they used to bake pies and cakes to raise money to keep it going. So, I learned to struggle from a very early way in a way that was truly indigenous to the South. You have to keep at it! [Chuckles]

KW: The film also left me with an appreciation of your deep connection to nature. I have that, too. I go for a walk in the woods every day. It's very spiritual to me.

AW: The forest is the first cathedral. I felt that from the time I was a child. I credit my mother with that. I used to think it came from her Native-American side. Whichever it was, she instinctively connected with nature, and taught me that. Church just could not hold my spirit. It was a beautiful, little church, too. As sweet as could be. It was at a bend in the road, with a big, oak tree sheltering it. Still, I wandered right out the window, mentally and emotionally, got into the trees, and never left.

Phil Cohrane Live!



PHOTO COURTESY MISSISSIPPI RECORDS

Portland record shop and label Mississippi Records presents jazz legend Philip Cohran live! Thursday, Feb. 6 at 7:30 p.m. at the Hollywood Theatre. Cohran was a member of Sun Ra's Arkestra, he was an activist at the Cabrini Green projects in Chicago, and the leader of the Artistic Heritage Ensemble. He has self-produced many amazing records over the years including the "Malcolm X Memorial" LP reissued by Mississippi Records. He currently lives in Chicago. For more information go to www.hollywoodtheatre.org.

KW: Kate Newell says: I'm more than awestruck about this opportunity to ask you a question. How did you feel about the screen adaptation of The Color Purple?

AW: I was worried about the film at first, because I'd never had a movie made of any of my work on a big scale like that. There had only been a couple of small, student efforts before that. The Color Purple was so overwhelming that I actually brought a magic wand to New York City for the premiere, and pointed it at the screen in the hope that movie didn't embarrass all of us. Lo and behold, it turned out to be a beautiful picture. The audience was so into it, gra-

cious and emotional, laughing when they should be laughing, crying when they should be crying. I got to feel it as a living work of art, as something useful. My interest in creating anything is that it be useful. People can love the beauty of it, but they should also use it to grow, to deepen.

KW: What was it like dealing with the blowback for the next several years coming from critics who said The Color Purple was anti-black men?

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