Texas Southern University alumnae and legendary jazz master and pianist, Joe Samples, recently performed in the 5th Annual Jazz in The Gardens as one of the headliners on day one of the highly-anticipated music festival. Jazz In The Gardens held on the grounds of the new Sunlife Stadium (formerly Dolphins Stadium).

This legendary performer could easily be known as the king of hard bop, and should also be credited for his switch to electronic piano in the fusion era. Joseph Leslie “Joe” Sample was born on February 1, 1939 in Houston, Texas. He is also one of the founding members of the Jazz Crusaders (the band which became simply The Crusaders in 1971) Sample remained a part of the group until its final album in 1991.

Sample began playing the piano when he was five years old. Since the early 1980s, he has enjoyed a successful solo career, making guest appearances on many recordings by other performers and groups, including Miles Davis, George Benson, Jimmy Witherspoon, B. B. King, Eric Clapton, Steely Dan, and The Supremes.

While in high school in the 1950s, Sample teamed up with two friends, saxophonist Wilton Felder and drummer “Stix” Hooper, to form a group called the Swingsters. While studying piano at Texas Southern University, Sample met and added trombonist Wayne Henderson and several other players to the Swingsters, which became the Modern Jazz Sextet and then the Jazz Crusaders, in emulation of one of the leading progressive jazz bands of the day, Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers.

The Crusaders, after losing several key members, broke up after recording Life in the Modern World for the GRP label in 1987. Despite the disbanding of the Crusaders, the members would join each other to record periodically over the years; releasing Healing the Wounds in the early ‘90s. Felder, Hooper, and Sample recorded their first album, called Rural Renewal, as the reunited Crusaders group in 2003 and did a live concert in Japan in 2004.

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Texas Southern University was founded in 1926 and became a state institution in 1947. Texas Southern possesses an impressive array of undergraduate and graduate programs, a diverse faculty, more than 80 student organizations, and an alumni network comprised of educators, entrepreneurs, public servants, lawyers, pilots, artists, and more, many of whom are change agents on the local, national and international stage. Nestled upon a sprawling 150-acre campus, Texas Southern has served as a cornerstone for developing the greatest potential in leaders from various socioeconomic, cultural, and racial backgrounds. Texas Southern is located in the heart of the city, giving its students and faculty easy access to the Museum District, neighboring educational institutions, the Texas Medical Center, downtown Houston, two major airports and all of the city’s major freeways. More than 9,487 students, along with nearly 1,500 faculty and staff comprise the University’s community making it one of the nation’s largest Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s). For more information, visit www.tsu.edu.