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SURPRISE! RECORDING ARTIST INCLUDES RAP ON GOSPEL CD

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Ever since he was plucked from crowds to perform with jazz greats Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker, **Willis Kirk** has known the wonderful joy that surprises can play in a person's life.

At 76, the former Indianapolis resident also knows the importance of creating surprises, which may partly explain why **Kirk** has included rap music in his latest gospel CD.

"People think rap is new, that it just started with young people," **Kirk** says. "But black preachers have been rapping for years."

So rap, jazz, gospel, spiritual and classical music will be featured as **Kirk** leads a band of 12 and a choir of 40 when he returns to Indianapolis to perform "**Rejoice! Rejoice!** A Modern Oratorio." The concert will be at 7 p.m. Friday at St. Luke's United Methodist Church.

"It's a combination of all the things that have happened to me over the years," says the graduate of Butler University and Crispus Attucks High School. "God has kept me thinking spiritually about what I could do musically to further the teachings of Christ. He has kept me on the right path."

His life journey includes being called up from the audience to play drums when he went to see Charlie Parker perform at an Indiana Avenue jazz club in 1949.

"The guy who played drums for him was late," **Kirk** recalls. "Someone told him (Parker) I could play drums and he pulled me up on the bandstand. I sat there in shock for a while. He kept turning around and saying, 'Play, play.' So I did. The drummer showed up two hours later."

Kirk had a similar experience when Duke Ellington came to Indianapolis and his drummer was ill.

"I was in the audience again -- the right place at the right time," **Kirk** says. "I've been influenced a lot by Ellington and his writing."

Now a San Francisco resident, **Kirk** received another surprise recently when a scholarship fund was named in his honor -- the Dr. **Willis Kirk** Scholarship Fund for the Arts. It was started by Covenant Community Church in Indianapolis.

"His work is so worthy, and he's been so giving with his musical talent," says Joy Gaddie, a board member on the scholarship committee. "He has really extended himself over the years and we felt it was time to name something in his honor in his hometown."

Gaddie says the scholarship fund is designed to help fill the void created by arts budget cuts in the schools.

"We're trying to develop a program at the church for the whole community," she says. "With the scholarship fund, we hope to buy instruments and allow students to learn to play and perform the music of their choice."

Kirk is delighted by the latest surprise in his life.

"I never thought I'd have a scholarship named for me," he says. "It's exciting."

Call Star reporter John Shaughnessy at (317) 444-6175.

What: A concert including spiritual, gospel, jazz, rap and classical music that focuses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When: 7 p.m. Friday.

Where: St. Luke's United Methodist Church, 100 W. 86th St.

Who: Concert will be led by **Willis Kirk**, a former Indianapolis resident who wrote and composed the music for his latest CD, "**Rejoice! Rejoice!**"

Cost: \$10. Net proceeds benefit the Dr. **Willis Kirk** Scholarship Fund for the Arts, a scholarship established in his honor by Covenant Community Church.

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