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Connections Between Jazz and Theoretical Physics Explored in Woods Hole Black History Month Committee Juneteenth Celebration June 19

Unresolved questions about the early universe and connections between theoretical physics and jazz will be the focus of a June 19 presentation by Penn State University Professor Stephon Alexander as part of the Woods Hole Black History Month Committee's celebration of Juneteenth. Dr. Alexander's presentation on "The Jazz of the Cosmos" will be followed by a social event to celebrate Juneteenth, the day recognized internationally for commemorating the end of slavery in the United States.

Stephon Haigh-Solom Alexander, an assistant professor of physics, astronomy, and astrophysics at Penn State University, was born in Trinidad and raised in the Bronx in New York City. He received a B.S. degree in physics from Haverford College in 1993, then attended Brown University for graduate studies, receiving an M.S. in physics, an M.S. in electrical engineering, and a Ph.D. in physics in 2000. He completed postdoctoral work at Imperial College in London and the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center. His research uses observations in cosmology to both construct and test fundamental theories.

An accomplished jazz musician who plays the tenor saxophone, Alexander sees similarities between his love for physics and music. He often uses music to teach young people about physics and make it more accessible, noting that both music and science are creative pursuits.

His talk on June 19 is free and open to the public and will begin at 12:00 p.m. (noon) in the Speck Auditorium of the Rowe Laboratory at the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) on MBL Street in Woods Hole, Mass. Professor Alexander is especially hopeful that young members from the wider community and students and visiting interns in the area will attend.

A speaker at the recent World Science Festival in New York City, Alexander was recognized by National Geographic Society in 2006 as a National Geographic Emerging Explorer. The program recognizes and supports gifted and inspiring young adventurers, scientists, photographers, and storytellers who are already making a difference early in their careers. During his noon presentation he will reflect on the connections between his role as a theoretical physicist and his pursuit as a jazz musician, looking at common ideas and themes within these two seemingly unrelated crafts.

The Juneteenth social event later in the day will feature music, a cookout, and more music played by The Rick Britto Quartet which features Rick Britto on saxophone, Andy McWain on piano, Mike Lavoie on bass, and Chris Poudrier on drums. Members of the quartet teach, compose, record and perform throughout New England as well as nationally and internationally.

The social event will be held from 4:30 to 9 p.m. at the Cape Verdean Club of Falmouth, Inc. at 126 Sandwich Road. As always, everyone is invited and families are encouraged to attend. There is no entry fee for the celebration at the Cape Verdean Club, but donations of food, time, or other resources will be accepted. For more information, contact: Ambrose Jearld at NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole at 508-495-2318 or Joe Santos of the Cape Verdean Club at 774-521-8167.

Often cited as African-American Independence Day, Juneteenth has been deemed a special day of recognition by many municipalities and states. The observances commemorate June 19, 1865, the day the Emancipation Proclamation was enforced in Texas, the last of the seceding states to be occupied by the federal army. At the time, an estimated 250,000 persons were still enslaved in Texas, despite the signing of the proclamation more than two years earlier.

The Black History Month Committee comprises members from six scientific institutions in Woods Hole (Marine Biological Laboratory, NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service, Sea Education Association, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Woods Hole Research Center, and USGS Science Center for Coastal and Marine Geology). The committee organizes special events during February for Black History Month and throughout the year to promote diversity in the institutions and in the local community.

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Related links:

Stephon H.S. Alexander: http://www.phys.psu.edu/people/display/index.html?person_id=4901

National Geographic Emerging explorers:
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/field/explorers/stephon-alexander.html>

Woods Hole Black History Month Committee:
<http://woodshole.er.usgs.gov/outreach/WHBHMC/index.htm>