**BHM 2024 THEME: Arts & Entertainment (A&E)**

# JOE SEALY: Canadian Legendary Pianist and Composer

**(Excerpts) by Jessica Dee Humphreys Special to the Star** Sunday, April 24, 2022

**Joseph Arthur Sealy** (born 16 August 1939) is a Canadian [jazz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jazz) musician. He was awarded the [Order of Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_Canada) in 2010.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Sealy#cite_note-1)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Sealy#cite_note-2)

Toronto is home to many great musicians, but few so venerable as jazz composer and pianist Joe Sealy.

Named for the Halifax community of Black Canadians formed in the early 1800s and razed out of existence in the 1960s, “Africville Suite” is dedicated to Sealy’s father, Joseph Maurice Sealy, who was born there. “He moved to Montreal with my paternal grandparents when he was nine,” Sealy says, “but he was there (in Africville) during the Halifax explosion in 1917.

Sealy says his father always hoped to return to Africville to live: “Throughout his working life he’d say, ‘One day, I want to go back and buy a house and retire there because there’s such good folks.’ But of course, by the time he retired, the community of Africville no longer existed.”

Africville is a story critically important to Canada’s history — as a place of refuge for newly freed slaves from America and as a reminder of a government’s broken promises. “During the 1950s, the city of Halifax committed to putting in paved streets and running water and proper sewer systems,” Sealy says, “but they reneged on it. A lot of the residents had installed indoor plumbing ready to be hooked to the city’s system, but it never materialized.”

At 82, Sealy is still keeping up a busy performance and production schedule, despite the pandemic. “I ended up busier than I thought I’d be,” he says of the past two years, during which he participated in a documentary on pianist and composer Oscar Peterson and appeared over Zoom at both the Kensington Market Jazz Festival and the Toronto Downtown Jazz Festival.

**View “Joe Sealy Africville Stories” video here:**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F99Ja8yGQi8&list=PLDOz8gpTgMEdcKbkaPjVyYPMipcT87s8**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F99Ja8yGQi8&list=PLDOz8gpTgMEdcKbkaPjVyYPMipcT87s8)