

November 26, 2012

12:15 p.m.

**Benny Luke Reception**

Remarks

Philip Breedon

Minister Counselor for Public Affairs

Hôtel de Talleyrand, Paris

Thursday, February 13, 2014, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

---

Good evening. My name is Philip Breedon and I am the Minister Counselor for Public Affairs at the U.S. Embassy. Welcome! It's a pleasure for me to welcome you to the historic George Marshall Center to celebrate the remarkable life of Benny Luke, Jr., as well as honor the vibrant world of African-Americans in Paris.

This is a timely event, falling in the midst of Black History Month. The Embassy is honored to be your hosts this evening.

African-Americans have been coming to Paris to create, to live, and to prosper for a long time, and Paris has always been a very special place for them. Some came to flee an oppressive environment in the United States. Some came because Paris has always had a special place in its heart for artists. James Baldwin, in his oft-cited 1984 Paris Review interview, caught both these strands when he said, “The French gave me what I could not get in America, which was a sense of “If I can do it, I may do it.”

There are many African American artists here this evening, and I salute you for your remarkable creative spirit. Many of you knew and loved Benny Luke. We are here to commemorate the African-American cultural presence in Paris through his singular life and accomplishments, from dancing with Josephine Baker in her last public performance in Monte Carlo to his unforgettable performance in La Cage Aux Folles to his devotion to the African-American community as co-owner of the long-running Parisian soul food institution Bojangles.

Before we get things going, I want you to know that tonight would not have been possible without the inspiration of two people. I would like to thank U.S. Congresswoman Corrine Brown, who got the ball rolling, but who, sadly, can't be with us this evening. I also want to thank Stephany Neal, for working so hard and so closely with us to plan this evening. Indeed, I'm going to hand off to Stephany now.

END