



Firebird Arts Alliance

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By Steven Brown

'New South Crossings' connects different musical pathways

TV series builds a bridge toward perfect harmony

Preview episode airs this weekend; series begins in the spring

Zeb Harrison (left) and Bill Hanna take part in a taping session at WTVI studio for the TV series "New South Crossings." The series is created by the Firebird Arts Alliance...



Bill Hanna and Zeb Harrison both play the trombone. Both have been in the Charlotte music scene for decades. Yet they belong to different worlds.

Hanna's dance and jazz groups play in clubs. Harrison's praise band, a tradition in African-American churches, stirs up the fervor in worship services.

The two men went all these years without crossing paths – until a television program that WTVI introduces Sunday drew them into the same studio...

"New South Crossings" – masterminded by David Tang... celebrates Charlotte's diversity through music. The city's origin as the intersection of two trading routes gives the show its cue: Groups that ordinarily travel different courses land together before the cameras. They discover that they have common ground after all.

"The show is... a testimony to something all of us should live by," gospel musician Dennis Reed said during a taping session in August. "No matter where

you come from in life, all of us should try to come together somehow..."



Gospel up-and-comer, Dennis Reed

...Tang, the series' ringleader, founded the Firebird Arts Alliance last year to build new connections among Charlotte-area artists...

"...Where I grew up (in Cleveland, Ohio), I was a definite minority," Tang said. "So I didn't really fit in anywhere. But that left me feeling that I fit in everywhere."

Now he's trying to help Charlotte performers fit into more places. Accomplished artists are at work here, he said. But Charlotte is still small enough that those who stay isolated in their own niches don't have enough audience to thrive.

"Nobody knows where they are, because they're spread too far and thin," Tang said. "I'm just having a blas connecting them."

People ask, 'How are you meeting them?' I just follow every lead I get.

He figures that when his Firebird group builds bridges among groups, "they'll be glad to cross them." Hanna and Harrison obviously are.

After their on-the-fly collaboration, Hanna pays Harrison a tribute as only a free-spirited jazz player could:

"Zeb can play a trombone," Hanna says. "He can *hurt* a trombone."



Bill Hanna (L) and Zeb Harrison