

John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie Residence

**105-19 37th Avenue (aka 34-68 106th Street), Corona
Queens Tax Map Block 1747, Lot 51**

Built: c. 1922

Architect: To be determined

Style: Colonial Revival

Proposed Action: Propose for Calendar April 4, 2023

Public Hearing June 6, 2023



Photos: Municipal Archives, c. 1940; Cyclomedia, c. 2021

The legendary jazz trumpeter, composer and bandleader, John Birks “Dizzy” Gillespie (1917-1993) purchased this three-story multi-family residence at the height of his career in 1953 and lived here until 1965. Of the various places he lived in New York City, Gillespie lived in Corona longest, and this home is strongly associated with his significant contributions to jazz and American culture. At the time, in contrast to many Queens neighborhoods, Corona welcomed African Americans, including such notable musicians as Gillespie’s friend Louis Armstrong, who settled on 107th Street, around the corner, in 1943. According to various accounts, many jazz musicians congregated in the basement rehearsal studio of Gillespie’s “plush” two-story apartment.

Gillespie, who used the building’s 106th Street address, is best remembered as a co-founder of the revolutionary jazz style bebop with Charlie Parker, as well as for his contributions to the development of Afro-Cuban jazz. Some of his most celebrated early compositions include: “Manteca,” “Groovin’ High,” “Salt Peanuts,” and “A Night in Tunisia.” Gillespie lived here with his wife Lorraine (1920-2004), who was also his personal manager. During this period Gillespie adopted his signature “bent” trumpet and released or performed on a succession of memorable albums, such as *Jazz at Massey Hall* (1954), *Afro* (1954), *World Statesman* (1956), *A Portrait of Duke Ellington* (1960) and *Jambo Caribe* (1964). Pianist Junior Mance recalled his years in the Gillespie band from 1958 to 1961, “probably my most profound learning experience. ‘I remember spending several hours at a time in his basement studio being shown chord changes that I never knew existed.’”

The U. S. State Department chose Gillespie to be the nation’s first jazz ambassador in 1956. Conceived during the Cold War to promote American culture and democratic values, his 18-piece big band traveled extensively, performing to great acclaim in Europe, the Middle East, and South America. Following his return, he appeared on Edward R. Murrow’s *Person to Person*, a CBS interview program that was broadcast live from Gillespie’s Corona home. Gillespie won many national and international awards during his six-decade-long career, entering *Down Beat* magazine’s Hall of Fame in 1960.

Built on the corner of 106th Street in 1922 as a single-family residence, 105-19 37th Avenue was converted to a three-family residence in c. 1940. Designed in the Colonial Revival style, it has simple facades of patterned red brick with cast-stone keystones and cartouches. Gillespie moved to New Jersey in 1966, retaining ownership of the building until 1985. He is buried in Queens, in nearby Flushing Cemetery. Aside from replacement of the original front and side doors, as well as windows, there have been few changes to the exterior since Gillespie resided here.

