

# Virginia Avery



*Teacher, Jazz pianist  
Inducted in 2006 at The Quilters Hall of  
fame Celebration  
Marion, Indiana  
Research Associate: Karen B. Alexander*

Born Virginia Cox in Greenwood, Indiana, Virginia Avery graduated from DePauw University with a degree in English Composition and went to work at Indianapolis News. She would soon marry, move to New York and raise four children. In New York she pursued both her love of fabrics and clothing as well as her love of jazz. This talented renaissance woman showed a very early interest in what would become a life-long passion - materials and fabrics, colors and movement. "We are all surrounded by designs every day of our lives," is her answer to where her inspiration comes from. "We just have to learn to open our eyes and see."

Totally self-taught in clothing construction, Jinny made her first dress at age 12 not realizing one was supposed to use a pattern. In the early 60s, Avery approached two fabric shops and landed herself two clothing-construction teaching jobs. Around that same time she realized quilting was beginning to make a comeback. Although she had never made a quilt, she thought of them as simply another form of sewing. It never occurred to her that she couldn't teach it. With some family quilts as a guide, and a couple of magazine articles, she gave herself a crash course and planned a series of lessons.

In August 1976, Avery attended the first quilt conference of the new "quilt renaissance" held in Ithaca, New York, and it became a turning point for her career. Not only were very much in evidence, and this gave Jinny the confidence to begin teaching clothing classes along with quilting classes.

As an accomplished jazz pianist, Jinny has played with the King Street Stompers for more than fifty years. This lively dedicated group of musicians has appeared on the Today Show and played for the United Nation's Delegates, as well as many other events. Her traffic-stopping coats that she is so well-known for are: "Don't Shoot the Piano Player She's Doing the Best She Can," on the cover of Wonderful Wearables, A Celebration of Creative Clothing (Collector Books, 1991); Midriff Lilies, which is the reverse side of "Don't Shoot the Piano Player She's Doing the Best She Can;" and Purple Passion on the cover of Quilts to Wear (Scribner, 1982). Her outfit for Fairfiend Fashion Show's 10th anniversary was "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," a garment titled with an old jazz tune.

In her forty-plus years in the wearable art and quilt world Virginia Avery has amassed a considerable body of celebrated work, as well as a reputation as a teacher for inspiring and motivating her students in a self-affirming, creative learning environment, richly deserving being named one of the 1000 most influential women of the 1990s by Mirabella magazine; selected as the 3rd recipient of the 1996 Silver Star Award for Lifetime Achievement by the International Quilt Festival; and now for her selection as the 36th Honoree in The Quilters Hall of Fame. Avery was once again in top form walking the public through the retrospective "Virginia Avery: A Flair for Life: of her work and playing her lively jazz at a jazz and jam session at the Community School of the Arts the night of July 15th. Her official induction took place Saturday, July 16, in Marion, amidst heart-felt testimonies, as well as tears and laughter, among her many friends and 17 family members present.

Website: <http://www.allianceforamericanquilts.org/treasures/main.php?id=1>

In December 2007 The Quilt Show, produced by Alex Anderson and Ricky Tims, released their documentary of Virginia Avery filmed in Avery's New York home.