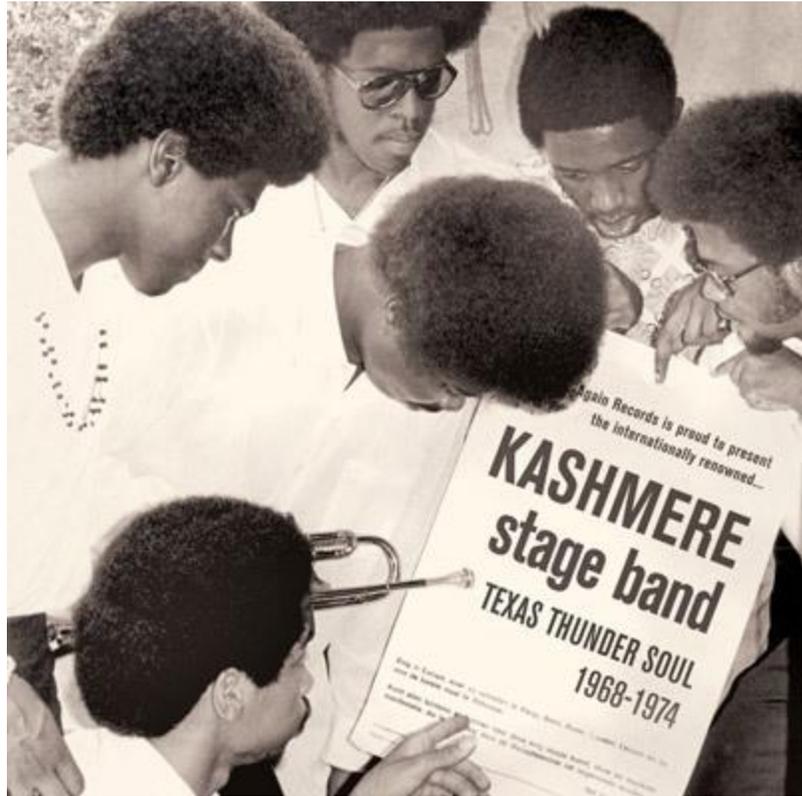


# Kashmere Stage Band

**Kashmere Stage Band.** The Kashmere Stage Band was a very successful high school jazz-funk band that existed from 1967 to 1978 in the North Houston area of Kashmere Gardens. The group was founded by Conrad O. Johnson, who was the bandleader of Kashmere High School from 1969 until 1978. Conrad “Prof” Johnson was born November 15, 1914, in Victoria, Texas, and moved with his family to Houston in 1923. The son of a band director, Johnson studied music at Houston College for Negroes before graduating from Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. Johnson’s teaching career began in 1941, but it was not until 1946 that he became a



jazz band instructor at Houston’s Booker T. Washington High School. He remained at Washington High until Kashmere Gardens Junior High School opened in 1957, providing him an opportunity to teach jazz basics to younger students. Johnson stayed at Kashmere Gardens Junior High until Kashmere Senior High School opened in 1967.

“Prof” Johnson taught the band to blend funk rhythms with big band jazz in order to create a unique sound especially designed for live performances and competitions. According to former student Joe Carmouche, Johnson worked long hours on evenings and weekends to help his students perfect their sound. Because he and his students were so committed, the Kashmere Stage Band quickly gained a reputation for high-quality performances, and it dominated local competition. Between 1969 and 1978, the Kashmere Stage band won 42 out of 46 contests in which it participated and was voted “Best High School Stage Band of the Year” at the 1972 All-American Stage Band Contest held in Mobile, Alabama.

In 1969, Johnson took the band into the studio to record its first album, *Our Thing*. According to Johnson, he hoped the album would provide students with a souvenir of the music they had created, and, it would help establish high standards for future students to follow. In all, the Kashmere Stage Band produced eight albums and three 45 rpm records between 1969 and 1978.

After more than thirty years of teaching jazz in Houston schools, Conrad Johnson retired in 1978. This brought to an end the Kashmere Stage Band, although the legacy that he created continues to this day. Kashmere High School is now home to the Conrad O. Johnson School of Fine Arts, a Houston ISD magnet school program. Furthermore, the Kashmere Stage Band’s

recordings are in high demand, and original albums have sold for hundreds of dollars. In 2006, a compilation entitled *Kashmere Stage Band: Texas Thunder Soul, 1968-1974* was released, featuring both live and studio recordings of the group.

*Chris Lehman*