



GOSPEL NOTES

Newsletter of the Twin Cities Community Gospel Choir

Summer 2001

Silent Auction & Benefit Concert Sept. 22

Join us for a very special event: the Choir's annual Silent Auction and Benefit Concert September 22nd. The auction begins at 5 p.m.; the concert begins at 7 p.m. at Brooklyn Park Lutheran Church, 1400 81st Ave. No., in Brooklyn Park.

The Concert

Following a gala silent auction, the choir will perform a special benefit concert featuring **Jearlyn Steele Battle as our guest soloist**. Ms. Battle is an exciting and powerful singer, well known to Minnesota audiences.

Led by **Artistic Director Robert Robinson**, the regular choir will be joined by 60 community members, who recently completed a six-week gospel music workshop with the choir. We're looking forward to an evening that is musically powerful, spiritually uplifting, and wonderfully fun! The choir is thrilled to perform at **Brooklyn Park Lutheran Church**, a newly renovated church with excellent acoustics and sightlines that is perfect for a concert.

Proceeds from this event will help fund the choir's general operations, and underwrite our work in prisons and homeless shelters. The choir's mission is to promote intercultural understanding and cooperation, and choir members represent the range of ethnic diversity found in the Twin Cities area.

The Silent Auction

"Blue Basket" — an exquisite hand blown art glass work by Dale Chihuly — will be the featured item at the silent auction. A generous anonymous donor contributed this 1997 piece by internationally renowned glass artist Chihuly. The piece has a certificate of appraisal valuing it at \$3,500.

Other valuable and interesting items include an **autographed Timberwolves basketball** donated by the team, tickets contributed by the **Minnesota Vikings**, **Northwest Airline tickets**, **Radisson Hotel** certificates for accommodations across the country, an 'A-Train' membership with free tickets for jazz performances at the **Dakota**, **hand blown art glass pieces by Peter Zelle**, **hand crafted jewelry by Choli Merrill and Kim Crocker**, and **original art by Lois Rhomberg**, along with many other original arts and crafts.

Please join us for this special event

You'll enjoy a fabulous concert featuring renowned vocalists, you'll have the opportunity to bid on wonderful and diverse items, and you'll help support our mission of spreading the message and joy of gospel music.

Tickets: Tickets are available by calling the choir office at 651-224-1718.



Jearlyn Steele Battle

Upcoming Events

Sunday, September 9, 1:30 p.m.
Lutheran Church of the Master
1200 69th Ave. No.
Brooklyn Center, MN

Sunday, September 16, 11 a.m.
Annual Fall Festival
Guardian Angels Catholic Church
8260 Hudson Blvd., Oakdale, MN

Saturday, September 22, 5 p.m.
Silent Auction & Benefit Concert
Brooklyn Park Lutheran Church
1400 81st Av. No. Brooklyn Park, MN

Sunday, September 23, 10 a.m.
Holy Family Catholic High School
8101 Kochia Lane, Victoria, MN

Friday, October 19, 8 p.m.
Journey to Sanctuary
Southern Theatre
1420 Washington Ave. So.
Minneapolis, MN

Friday, January 25, 7:30 p.m.
Old Tyme Gospel Concert
Hopkins Center for the Arts
1111 Main Street, Hopkins, MN

The Twin Cities Community Gospel Choir

Founded and directed by Robert Robinson, the Twin Cities Community Gospel Choir gathers more than 75 singers of various degrees of musical experience, ethnic backgrounds and religious creeds to celebrate the rich tradition of African American gospel music. Backed by a talented ensemble of musicians, the choir strives to share the joy and the power of praise music, ranging from inspirational spirituals to cutting edge contemporary gospel.

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Photos

Charissa Uemura

Newsletter

Lucinda Plaisance

The Evolution of Spirituals into Gospel

While the earliest spirituals were “call and response” songs directly from the African tradition, many new songs developed as variations upon a theme based on Bible stories, and set to old tunes from popular songs, Anglo-American folksongs, minstrel songs, and hymns.

Through casual group singing and improvisation, plantation songs were reshaped into characteristic African-American folksongs, creating a unique song type with its own text, music, and distinctive style. Since songs were learned and passed on by ear, the songs often strayed into wholly new versions, and the original songs were forgotten.

“Homily” spirituals originated with the folk preacher and taught to the congregation by him or the deacon. Ministers were encouraged to compose spiritual songs and incorporate them into the worship, preaching and prayer.

Active participation in the church services was expected and encouraged, and congregations contributed to these songs. Their interjected affirmations or expressions of faith often developed into song refrains. Sometimes an excited preacher would be carried away by his emotion and compose a song on the spot during the sermon, with the congregation chiming in phrases in support, practices which continue today in many African-American churches. Spirituals that originate in the emotionally charged atmosphere of the religious service were called “preaching spirituals.”

African-American religious music continued to evolve as it was exposed to more influences, and some distinct differences developed between old-time Spirituals and more modern gospel music:

- ◆ **Spirituals focus on stories from the Bible**, especially the Old Testament, while gospel music usually focuses on a single story, subject, or theme that is stressed through several verses and repetitive phrases.
- ◆ **Spirituals are traditionally sung a capella**, while instrumental accompaniment is an integral and complementary part of gospel music.
- ◆ **Spirituals generally focus on one or two repeated strains** (repeating the ‘A’ part or alternating ‘A’ and ‘B’ parts), with gospel containing verses and refrains, tending to be 16 or 32 measures long.
- ◆ **While spirituals use simple call and response models**, gospel music expands the intricacy and inventiveness of both the leaders ‘call’ and the congregation/ choir’s ‘response’, with both roles equally strong and sometimes reversed, with the choir ‘leading’ and a solo voice responding.

Gospel music retained the intense, deeply emotional character of the spirituals, but became more sophisticated as it developed in new urban environments. Since gospel was always music of the people and based on well known folk or popular tunes, it continued to evolve through the influence of popular music, particularly blues and jazz.

Next issue: Early and classic gospel

Robert's Corner

The summer has been extremely busy for the Gospel Choir. We've spent the last two months in vocal workshops learning how to maximize our vocal abilities. We'd like to send a shout of thanks out to facilitators **Camilla Horne** and **Ginger Commodore**.



We were very fortunate to receive a grant from the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council (MRAC) to support a month-long choral workshop at the **Plymouth Adult Correctional Facility**. Twenty men participated in the rehearsals and concert, which were amazing. There is a magnitude of talent locked away behind prison walls. It was an eye-opening experience for each of us. We received a moving letter from the Senior Coordinator of Volunteer Services at the facility:

"Every participant was uplifted and unburdened by working with you and your inspirational music. One participant said, 'You can't imagine how this experience has gotten me through the last month. It has touched my heart and lifted my spirit each week so I have

been able to face being here. I only have four weeks left and I know I can make it!'" A special thanks to MRAC and all those whose gifts support our prison ministry!

The choir also had an opportunity this summer to do a chapel service at St. Joseph's Home for Children. This event was also sponsored by MRAC. During the entire program, I just kept fighting tears. The children were so sweet and very receptive and willing to participate. We shared copies of one of our recordings with each child and staff member, and will be returning to the facility in late December.

Meet the Choir – Jeanne Lee

"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help" is a favorite scripture of choir member and alto section leader **Jeanne Lee**. Jeanne has been a member of TCC Gospel Choir since 1991. She joined after hearing the choir at the Basilica during a Dr. Martin Luther King celebration.

"God had to reach me through the back door,"

Jeanne says. She recalls attending church because her mother said she must go. "At first, I didn't understand the meaning of the words I heard at Church...since becoming a choir member, I have a stronger relationship with God and my desire to do his work has developed tremendously," she said. "My taste of God has developed."

During a performance, Robert introduced Jeanne as "a person who is small in stature, but has a big voice." Jeanne is a very talented woman who uses her talents to support the choir. A professional graphic designer, she has created nearly all the printed materials used by the choir, including the CD covers, music books, posters, and brochures.

"Robert is so supportive and I feel blessed to have the pleasure of working with him and the choir," Jeanne said. When asked what advice she would give to a fellow choir member, she says "You need to figure out what it is that you need to support and to do God's work, and do it." — *Toni Daniels*



We're doing a couple special events this fall: The first is a collaboration with **Cathy Young Dance, Djola Bernard Branner and Mary Moore Easter**. The event is titled, **"Journey to Sanctuary"**, and will feature gospel singing, dance, and spoken word that will be both educational and inspirational. The event will be **October 19-21 and 25-28** at the **Southern Theatre**; tickets go on sale in late September. For more information, contact the Southern Theatre box office at (612) 340-0155.

Mark your calendars for our second "Olde Tyme Gospel" concert on Friday, January 25, 2002, at the Hopkins Center for the Arts. We're hoping that **Thelma Buckner** will join us again, along with **my mother**. We've got new music I'm sure you'll enjoy. Tickets go on sale January 2, 2002 through the Hopkins Center for the Arts box office. Seating is limited, so call early.

I want to thank you for your continued support. We appreciate you purchasing tickets to our concerts and your donations that assist with our expenses. In November you will receive our annual solicitation letter. I realize that you may be bombarded with requests for financial contributions. However, I hope that you will consider making a donation to the choir this year. We are doing all we can to keep gospel music alive and accessible in our region.

Check our website to see where we'll be performing or if you are looking for great gifts of inspirational music for birthdays, holidays and special events: www.tccgospel.org.

On a personal note, I've just released a new CD with nationally celebrated pianist Lorie Line. The CD is titled, "The Show Stoppers" and is available on my website at www.robertrobinsonmusic.com.

Thanks to our supporters

We wish to thank the following contributors who made financial donations last year. Without their support we would be unable to share the joy and power of our songs. God bless you!

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