



HERITAGE ENSEMBLE REFLECTIONS

"...tearing down walls and building bridges between all people."

Notes from the Artistic Director

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Heritage Ensemble receives Illinois Arts Council Agency Grant Youth Employment in the Arts Project

Heritage Ensemble Artistic Director, Mrs. Sharon Samuels Reed, recently was notified that the Heritage Ensemble has been awarded a grant from State Funds for a Youth Employment in the Arts Project. With this grant, it has been proposed that 4 youth from the Youth Heritage Ensemble will have an opportunity to be selected to participate in activities from proposed categories of "Educate, Empower, and Encourage." Youth will have opportunities to discuss the historical background of selected music and the sociological impact of past history on the activities and decisions of today; to actively participate in the production and creative design that is a part of concert production, and to share with other youth, in a camp like setting, insights and selections that have been learned. Through this grant, the Heritage Ensemble will strengthen the legacy that is found in our mission of "tearing down walls and building bridges between all people."

Welcome to our latest edition of *Reflections!* As we heighten awareness of the impact of music born out of the African American Experience, it will be our pleasure to share with you the historical origins of this music. The Negro Spiritual is undeniably a music born out of this experience, so we shall capture the originality of dialect, the genuine strength and perseverance of the music, and the power of commitment that sustained a people through some of the darkest times in American history. And yet even in the midst of centuries of slavery, embedded within the Negro spiritual you will find the hope, tenderness, and joy in the Lord. Interestingly enough you will not find any sense of negativity or bitterness.

Can we learn from the Negro Spiritual? Can we grow from the Negro Spiritual? The answer from the Heritage Ensemble is a resounding "YES!" We study, preserve, and perform, from an historical perspective, the beautiful melodies that have sustained a people, inspired a movement, and been a balm in Gilead.

With the Negro Spiritual as our grounded center, the variety of musical performances from the Heritage Ensemble not only fills a cultural void, but will never cease to amaze you. For example, this past Spring 2014, the Heritage Ensemble was invited to share our music at the Bradley University Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. US Congressman John Lewis was not

only amazed, but also moved by the music - and so was the audience!

As we celebrate the mission of the Heritage Ensemble, you will see that our commitment to "...tearing down walls and building bridges between all people," is a mission that we live as an Ensemble. And because the heart of the Heritage Ensemble is so closely knitted with our Peoria Metro Community, it has been our pleasure to establish the "Bridge Builders Award." This award is given to a member of our community who has demonstrated a commitment in word and deed to the mission of the Heritage Ensemble.

About the Juneteenth—An American Celebration Concert

On Saturday, June 14, 2014, the Juneteenth Concert will reflect the joy, excitement, and deep appreciation for music that has nourished a nation. We will celebrate Juneteenth, African American Music Appreciation Month, and Flag Day.

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration commemorating the date when the last slaves in America were freed, which came though a message received in Texas on June 19, 1865 (almost 2.5 years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation). When Blacks in Texas heard the news, they sang, danced and prayed. There was much rejoicing and jubilation that their prayers had finally been answered. Many of the slaves left their masters immediately with nothing but the clothes on their

backs and hope in their hearts. Oh, Freedom!

Within the Proclamation from President Obama announcing June as African-American Music Appreciation Month, he declared, "...amidst the injustice of slavery, African Americans lifted their voices to the heavens through spirituals. ...Years later, spirituals contributed to the advent of a new form of music: gospel. The African-American music tradition also reflects creativity and individualism. Blues, jazz, soul, and rock & roll synthesize various musical traditions to create altogether new sounds. During African-American Music Appreciation Month, we recall the known and unknown musicians who created this musical history." And on June 14th, the Heritage Ensemble will take our audience on a musical journey that will reflect the strength of the

spiritual with the call for community and love from contemporary selections.

The patriotism of Flag Day will be celebrated as we declare in song and verse the commitment of a people, historically denied the recognition of their contributions to this country. "My Country Tis of Thee" will resonate with all in the auditorium.

At this point, has the newsletter convinced you to attend the Concert at 7:30pm on June 14th at the ICC Performing Arts Center?

We certainly hope so and look forward to seeing you there!

