

hitting the high Notes

A Newsletter From  WILLIAMSPORT CIVIC CHORUS

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Barbara Hemmendinger, editor

“American Spirituals” on Feb. 18 to make a shared, joyful noise

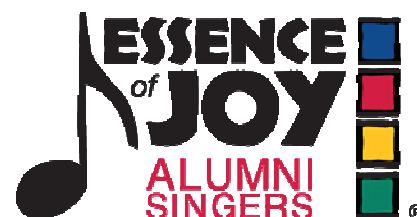
The Williamsport Civic Chorus proudly announces a concert commemorating Black History Month at 3 pm on Sunday, February 18, 2018, when Dr. Anthony Leach and his Essence of Joy Alumni Singers (EOJAS) will perform gospel music and spirituals with us.

Co-sponsored by the Pennsylvania College of Technology and held in its Klump Academic Center Auditorium, this concert will be directed jointly by Dr. Leach, who

is professor of music and music education at Pennsylvania State University, and by the Chorus’ Music Director Michael Connor. Leach last served as our guest director back in May 1996! If memory serves, you should expect a rousing afternoon, especially as more than a dozen of his former Penn State music students from the EOJAS regional tour choir will add their voices.

Tickets for “American Spirituals” may be purchased at the

Otto Book Store, the Robert M. Sides Family Music Center, [online](#), and at the door. As always, children ages 12 and under receive free admission. 🎵



Singers’ Corner:



Here we are in January, moving forward together as singers in the Civic Chorus.

In 2018, we welcome rehearsal accompanist Christian Humcke, who also serves as organist and music director for St. Mark’s Lutheran Church. The Chorus is already at work preparing the remaining two performances of this season (see page 4)

in addition to several “gigs” in the community. Looking ahead, there is much enthusiasm about our gala 75th season next year when you can expect additional collaborations, including separate concerts with the Williamsport Symphony Orchestra and with the Susquehanna Valley Chorale.

From June 28 to July 5, 2019 our singers and friends will also get an unparalleled chance to participate in our performance tour in Ireland!

The 65-member Chorus is open to singers at all levels who share our passion for making mu-

sic “of the people, by the people, and for the people”. Rehearsals take place from 7 to 9 pm on Monday evenings, and more information about joining may be obtained by contacting the Director at wccmail@yahoo.com.

Non-singers who wish to be part of the Williamsport Civic Chorus family may also get involved in numerous ways. They usher, set and strike the stage, distribute tickets, market the Chorus, and assist with grant development and fundraising. Please lend a hand and your voice! 🎵



Know the Score



Michael Connor

As I eagerly await February's concert with Dr. Anthony Leach, I think back to 1999 when I had the chance to sing under the direction of the late Moses Hogan, a pianist, conductor, and arranger of international renown. It was a highlight of my musical career and to date is one that will hold itself highly in my memory. Three days of music, 8 am to 8 pm, with a concert on the third day to a packed crowd of family members and music lovers who were ready to hear what we had been working for, so hard.

I had heard so many good things about Moses, sung his arrangements at school and festivals, and knew that my collegiate professors had spoken highly of his skill both on and off of the page. Very few contemporary composers had the same aura about them as Moses. Maybe Rutter? Whitacre today? The bar was set high.

On the first day of rehearsal, we canvassed the auditorium for him. The moment he stepped in, honestly, there was a glow about him. His honest smile, the way he talked with us, his passion for mu-

sic. It was contagious. We all wanted a little slice, and he wanted to give us it all.

It would be an understatement to say that we worked diligently for Moses. He demanded it by not even asking for it. We offered it freely.

After the first day of rehearsal, he sent us away to our lodging, telling us, "Get a good night's rest. You'll need it for tomorrow". He was right, but what he did inspired and energized us. How could we even go to sleep now?! So, being good little choir members, my best friend and I went against our leader's last words of the day and wandered from our hotel to a local diner for a late-night snack. We were hungry and wired from the day's activity. No sooner had we sat down than Moses himself walked in and immediately spotted us. We were doomed, right?! We hung our heads in shame as he stepped towards us. "Mind if I join you? I'm too excited, too." What proceeded was one of the most magical evenings of conversation that we had ever had. We laughed harder, learned farther, and grew more as musicians into the early morning hours with that man, on that day, in that diner than I can remember ever learning in any semester long-course.

It must have been three in the morning or so when we departed from the diner. A short walk and what seemed like an even shorter evening of sleep had us up bright and early to be on the stage for another round of rehearsing. Moses and I kept in touch through email for the next couple of years. At one point, he asked me for my address to send a birthday card. He amazingly did even better than that; he sent me

a signed copy of the *Oxford Book of Spirituals* that he had edited.

Taken from us, too soon...he passed in 2003. Hogan's arrangements are today standard works for high schools, churches, and professional and community choirs. His arrangements – often a *cappella* – are marked by rhythmic and harmonic complexity. But, his legacy with me resides in that festival, that evening, those stories and connections.

I invite you to our February concert. Dr. Anthony Leach and the Essence of Joy Alumni Singers will be joining us for "American Spirituals". So many comparisons can be drawn from Moses to Dr. Leach. An incredible musician and composer in his own right, Dr. Leach's charisma and driving desire to educate and inspire are what I am sure the WCC singers will latch onto when he rehearses with us. You should come to this concert; it will be inspiring! 🎵

"Know the Score" is provided for the enjoyment of our readers by Michael Connor. Currently in his third year as music director of the Williamsport Civic Chorus, Michael holds a master's degree in education with music specialization from Bucknell University, having served as a graduate assistant to Dr. William Payn there. Connor teaches choral music at Central Mountain Middle School in Clinton County and has also appeared as a frequent vocal soloist with the Chorus and with numerous other performing organizations.

The Williamsport Civic Chorus receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

**Visit us:
williamsportcivicchorus.org**

Editor's Interview with EOJAS' Director, Dr. Anthony "Tony" Leach

BH: Our joint performance will be titled "American Spirituals". What distinguishes the spiritual from sacred music?

TL: The African American Black Spiritual is a genre of music with its origin in the USA spanning more than 400 years. African Americans were in servitude to persons who brought them to them without consent. Musical traditions from various African cultures may be found in the melodies, rhythm, harmony, form, and narrative of this music in West Africa that is often with Bible stories and emotions of a people who wanted to be free. While doing research on the development of the Gospel Music back in 1979, I met time with Dr. Lena McManie, an educator, composer, pastor, and scholar who was based in Chicago. She defined the Spiritual and her response was as follows: "The Spiritual was the slaves' means of response to the conditions in which they found themselves. Black Gospel music is the contemporary therapeutic musical expression by African Americans as they respond to the conditions in which we find ourselves."

While many Spirituals use sacred lyrics others originated from "field hollers" while people worked in the fields. The "call/response" format that enables a preacher, or elder to "call out" a phrase with a response that was usually short and repetitive helped to alleviate some of the pain, disappointment and horror that slaves encountered. There are also many "game songs" that children sang while interacting with

each other that are also in this category of music.

During the 1870s and 1880s, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were the first ensemble to [take] this music from the field to the church, and ultimately, the concert hall. Since the early years of the 20th century, African American composers have arranged spirituals to be performed by choirs for concert performances. R. Nathaniel Dett, Harry T. Burleigh, John Work, Hall Johnson, and William Grant Still all contributed to this process of taking music from the folk/religious oral tradition to concert music for presentation in the most prestigious concert sites across the USA and beyond.

It is true that in many of today's African American congregations, singing remains a significant role within the worship encounter. Traditional gospel, contemporary gospel, hymns, Praise and Worship, and Gospel Hip Hop are the idioms that are in vogue. The Spiritual is alive and well within churches where pastoral and musical leadership understand the impact of the Spiritual as a "call to remembrance" and a "hope for what is to come." The concert Spiritual in today's choral scene is a welcome and familiar component of programming by high school and college/university choirs. Composer/arrangers such as Rosephanye Powell, Rollo Dilworth, Marques L. A. Garrett, Raymond Wise, Diane White Clayton, and the late Moses Hogan are doing their part to preserve and promote the musical integrity and purpose of the Spiritual within American choral communities.



Dr. Anthony Leach

BH: Please talk about music as a unifying force in the African American community as well as in bridging diverse groups.

TL: Within African and African American cultures, music is a response to what one hears, feels, sees, and thinks. Rhythm and pulse are the two most significant musical components within this music. African Americans do not separate song, dance, and listening into specific disciplines. They embrace music with the body, mind, and spirit, and while that response may be informed through history and culture, music functions deeply at the core of the African American experience. Spirituals and the Blues are at the root of American music. One does not have to be Caucasian, African American, Latino, or other to understand the impact of music in one's journey as we interact within and outside of one's culture.

BH: What role do you see for art and music in advancing humanity?

(Continued on page 4)

74th SEASON**"American Spirituals"****Sunday, Feb. 18, 2018****3 pm****Klump Academic Center****Auditorium****Penn College****"Mozart's *Coronation*
Mass and****Poulenc's *Gloria*"****Sunday, April 29, 2018****3 pm****St. John's-Newberry****United Methodist Church****2101 Newberry Street**

"The Williamsport Civic Chorus is an open community of singers dedicated to making fine music accessible to all through education, participation, and inspiration."

(Continued from page 3)

TL: Artists provide commentary on all aspects of the following themes:

Man's Humanity to Man
Man's Inhumanity to Man
Man's Relationship With God
Man's Relationship With Nature

If one thinks for longer than a minute about a song, dance, painting, poetry, story, photo, or any artistic expression by an artist as he/she responded to something that provided meaning and inspiration, then

it should be pretty clear that we're all moving forward while contemplating the who, what, when, where, why, and how of our existence. All of us are in a continual process of emerging from one level of awareness and understanding of something or someone to the next informed level.

Sometimes artists take great risks as they capture the emotion, challenge, horror, excitement, affirmation, and celebration from things, people and places they encounter or observe. It is profound on many levels to think that visual artists, composers, choreographers, writers, and others within the arts community are truly the

the "gate-keepers" of culture and history through their creative accomplishments. Let's see how the role of African American sacred/secular music continues to unfold and impact 21st century America and indeed the world. 