

Spine-tingling spirituals

By Jessie Riggins *January 15, 2018*

The American Spiritual Ensemble, led by founder Dr. Everett McCorvey, stunned Harriman-Jewell audiences with its beautiful performance at the Folly Theater Saturday night.



Founded in 1995, the American Spiritual Ensemble works hard to keep the music of the American Negro Spiritual alive, and are very successful at it. This group's tight-knit vocals and clear passion for the music presented, combined with the joy founder and music director Dr. Everett McCorvey emits from the podium, are a recipe for continuing success across not only the nation but around the globe as the ensemble continues to bring great honor and shine a spotlight on this important genre of American musical history.

The ensemble is comprised of members who have sung in some of the most prestigious opera houses and concert halls, educators that run vocal and opera departments at universities across the country, and professional singers. Their dedication and pride in presenting the music with this ensemble is infectious, and the diverse audience enjoyed every moment of this night of stellar musicianship.

There was a good balance of solo pieces and full ensemble works in both halves of the concert, showcasing a wide variety of members. Soprano Angela M. Brown performed the powerful spiritual "Lord, How Come Me Here," her engaging, mournful performance leaving some audience members (and herself) in tears. Baritone Keith Dean's smooth vocal line soared on -

“I Don’ Feel Noways Tired,” and bass Nathaniel Thompson’s “Go Down Moses” sent chills down audience member’s spines. Seriousness was put on hold for Chauncey Packer’s “Dry Bones,” which delighted many, as well as a small quintet performance of ‘Sit Down Servant.” The most electrifying solo performance of the concert came from countertenor Matthew Truss, during the Devin L. Davis/Charles M. Murrell arrangement of “Wade in the Water,” his sound bright and colorful, but still with a power that sailed above the ensemble behind him.

McCorvey was exuberant from the podium as he gave historical context to the audience for many of the works. Well-known spirituals like “Old Time Religion” and “When the Saints Go Marching In,” along with arrangements by well-known composer/arrangers like Moses Hogan and Roland Carter, were excellently performed, and McCorvey introduced audience members to lesser-known spirituals, shining a spotlight on these impressive works that more ears should hear. The powerful, rich sound of the full ensemble washed over audience members in the C. Stephen Metzler Hall. This venue was perhaps the perfect one for the American Spiritual Ensemble, as the resonance of their sound, coupled with the dazzling acoustics, was breathtaking.

In a night full of fabulously stirring performances, an unforgettable moment occurred following intermission that really touched many in the audience and on stage. As the American Spiritual Ensemble began “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,” the predominantly caucasian audience rose, unprompted, for the “Negro National Anthem,” a touching moment during these tumultuous times in our country, and a brief sense of unity. The concert ended with a more lighthearted “Circle of Life” from Disney’s *The Lion King*, and a well deserved standing ovation from the captivated audience.

REVIEW:

Harriman-Jewell Series

The American Spiritual Ensemble - Saturday, January 13, 2018

Stephen Metzler Hall, The Folly Theater - 300 W 12th St., Kansas City, MO



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