



Wisconsin Gossellers

Jan 2020 Newsletter

Jubilee Singers: Sacrifice and Glory (page 1 of 3)

Aired Nov 19, 2019 on PBS

Resource: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/singers/>



On November 16, 1871, a group of unknown singers — all but two of them former slaves and many of them still in their teens -- arrived at Oberlin College in Ohio to perform before a national convention of influential ministers. After a few standard ballads, the chorus began to sing spirituals -- "Steal Away" and other songs" associated with slavery and the dark past, sacred to our parents," as soprano Ella Sheppard recalled. It was one of the first public performances of the secret music African Americans had sung in fields and behind closed doors.

"Jubilee Singers: Sacrifice and Glory," produced by Llewellyn Smith, tells the story of a group of former slaves who battled prejudice and oppression to sing their way into a nation's heart. Eventually, they would perform for presidents and queens, tour the United States and Europe, and establish songs like "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "This Little Light of Mine" as a cherished part of the nation's musical heritage. The program features today's Fisk Jubilee Singers performing these and many other spirituals; Dion Graham narrates.
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The concert in Oberlin was the turning point in a daring fundraising experiment for impoverished Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where the singers were students. Established in January 1866, Fisk taught freed slaves how to count their wages, how to write the new names they had chosen for themselves, and read both the ballot and the Bible. Despite emancipation, the South was a dangerous place: Fisk students who dared teach in the countryside were routinely assaulted and whipped by Ku Klux Klan nightriders; one was shot at in his classroom; another had her school building burned to the ground.

Charged with keeping the financially troubled school afloat, treasurer George Leonard White proposed taking Fisk's most gifted singers on a fundraising tour of the North. Before they even left town, they encountered resistance: the parents were afraid to let their children go; White's fellow teachers opposed the tour; and the American Missionary Association, the northern religious organization that operated Fisk, refused to help, worried that the chorus's appeal for funds would jeopardize their own fundraising activities. But White persevered.

Following the path of the Underground Railway, the group made its debut in Cincinnati. Despite the warm reception, donations totaled less than \$50. Night after night, it was the same: crowds loved their singing, but the collection plate yielded barely enough to cover their expenses. Yet no one turned back.

Life on the road took its toll. White and the singers endured rheumatism, bronchitis, chronic coughs. Their clothes ran to rags. But after the triumphant Oberlin performance, word started to spread. In December, the Jubilee Singers appeared at Henry Ward Beecher's weekly prayer meeting at Brooklyn's Plymouth Church. "Every church wanted the Jubilee Singers from that time on," wrote Maggie Porter. They sang for Mark Twain, President Ulysses S. Grant, congressmen, diplomats.

After less than two weeks' rest, the singers were back on the road, touring the Eastern United States. Eventually they would tour Europe to universal acclaim and sing for the royal families of Holland, Germany, and Britain.

The group raised what today would be millions of dollars, but they paid a terrible price. Worn down by the relentless schedule, an advance man suffered a nervous breakdown. George White lost his wife to typhoid fever. White himself nearly died of a pulmonary hemorrhage. Contralto Minnie Tate's voice was torn to shreds. Tenor Benjamin Holmes's nagging cough was caused by tuberculosis. They faced discrimination on the road and from the press. A grueling tour of Germany -- ninety-eight days, forty-one towns, sixty-eight concerts -- brought with it low morale, frayed nerves, and rivalries among the singers.

After almost seven years of touring, the Jubilee Singers returned home. They were honored by Fisk for raising the funds to complete Jubilee Hall and save their school.



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But their contributions extended far beyond Fisk University. They had introduced the world to the power of spirituals and challenged racial stereotypes on two continents. "In their wake, hotels, railways, steamship lines, and boards of education integrated their facilities. The Jubilees not only introduced the world to the music of black America, they championed the liberties of all Americans," says Andrew Ward, co-writer of the documentary and author of "Dark Midnight When I Rise: The Story of the Jubilee Singers." More than 125 years later, the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University continue the concert tradition begun by that courageous original chorus of former slaves.

Notes from the November Rehearsal & Worship Service: The Gospellers received a personal letter from Pastor Kim Henning. It read, "Blessings to you in Christ! Our community extends its gratitude for the faith and music that you brought into our midst at Grace Congregational Church! We are grateful for the blessing of our service in worship! Thank You!"

Save the dates! 35+ singers from Germany are coming to visit Wisconsin in Summer

The Gospel & More choir (Essen, Germany) will be here June 28-July 4.

David, Malena, Martin & Kimberly are working on the schedule:

June 28: Arrive Chicago, coach bus to Appleton/Two Rivers

June 29-July 1: Appleton/Two Rivers area, incl. 1-2 concerts, details TBD

July 1-3: Madison area, incl. probably 1 more concert, details TBD

July 4: Return to Chicago for flight to NYC

What can you do?

1. Hold that week free as we pin down details. We're eager to sing together again!
2. If you're in those areas, volunteer to recruit host families & churches.
3. Consider what you might donate (snacks, water bottles, activity fees, etc.) to defray costs & provide a warm welcome.





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One Gossellers Experience of Being Welcomed into the Wisconsin Gossellers Choir

By Cathy Jones

I signed up for the Wisconsin UCC Gosseller Workshop last Winter thinking I could use a little January sunshine and well, let's face it, lunch is included so how bad could it be?!

To call the experience "refreshing" is an understatement - "Exuberant Welcome" is much more like it!

From my first experience of joining the Gossellers "cold turkey" (I didn't know a soul except to experience the overwhelming heart of the Cedar Community organization in caring for its patients – one of them being my mom), to our 2 ½ week tour singing at 7 locations around Germany this summer, to our once-a-month Saturday practices held around Wisconsin, I can honestly say the Ministry of our Gospel Music touches all who are fortunate enough to experience it – choir members and listeners alike – I've seen it on people's faces and I've felt it in my heart.

Our choir of 40+ members are talented in music for sure, but it doesn't stop there! Members are from all walks of life – cranberry growers, entrepreneurs, professors, educators, retired clergy, church choir members – and even people like me who hadn't sung in a choir since the 6th grade. In true UCC fashion, all are Exuberantly Welcome!

What an extraordinary experience – to invite a stranger into their mix with open arms ... they didn't know me, my back story, if I could carry a tune; they didn't know if I would I be a good fit as an American ambassador staying in the homes of unknown German families who volunteered to host us, or if I'd even be dependable enough to come to practices and events.

Blind trust. No judging. No vetting. Just come as you are, when you are able. Exuberant Welcome at it's best.

Full disclosure - I had forgotten what that felt like ... I'm an HR professional who let's just say that sometimes sees things through not so rosy glasses! To be at the receiving end of such open kindness has been a true gift to me that extends far outside our singing time – and one I would never have experienced had I not taken a chance and signed up for a January lunch!

Gratefully enjoying the camaraderie of new friends and a Ministry through song ... Gospel song at that!

Notes from December Rehearsal & Concert: There were many positive comments from the Attic Angels residents. About 70 people were in the audience. The Wisconsin Gossellers took in \$145.00 at Attic Angel Concert and will receive an additional check from the social director of Attica Angel Place in appreciation of our choir coming to sing there.



Mission Statement: To bridge cultural divides and touch souls through the transformative power of gospel music

Vision Statement: A world where God's love triumphs over that which divides us.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Lunch by</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Sat Feb 8th 2020	10am-3pm	First Congregational UCC 311 2nd St S, Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494	sopranos	Rehearsal
Sat Mar 14th 2020	10am-3pm	Congregational UCC 1511 Nicolet Blvd, Neenah, WI 54956	altos	Rehearsal
Sat Apr 11th** May change date due to easter weekend	10am-3pm	Olivet Congregational UCC 313 W Prairie St, Columbus, WI 53925	Tenor & Basses	Rehearsal
Sat May 9 2020	10am-3pm	First Congregational UCC 311 2nd St S, Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494	sopranos	Rehearsal
Fri Jun 5 -Sun Jun 7, 2020	Fr 7pm warm-up Sat rehearsal Sat concert??	Green Lake Conference Center W2511 WI-23, Green Lake, WI 54941	Green Lake Center	Rehearsal & concert
Jun 28-Jul 4 2020	Gospel & More Choir from Germany visits	Appleton Area Madison Area Specific churches TBD	n/a	Rehearsal & concerts & touring
Sat Aug 8 - Sun Aug 9, 2020	Sat 10am-3pm Sun 10am Service 11:30am Picnic	Folk Song Farm (Faith UCC picnic) 4811 Pioneer Rd., Richfield, WI	Faith UCC	Rehearsal & Worship

Music-based assignment for the month

Become more familiar with the Sleep song. Review the music & listen to a video or audio-clip from the internet.

Mission-based assignment for the month

Talk to someone from a different generation than you and get an understanding of what their priorities are currently in their life. It will help bridge an understanding between generational gaps.