

Fulfilling an Extraordinary Legacy

Gospel Music Programs at Washington Performing Arts



WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS



Why Gospel Music Programs?

Gospel music is a uniquely American art form that emerged from traditional African-American worship contexts in the early 20th century. Emphasizing communal engagement and expressive musicality, this tradition has profoundly shaped popular and sacred American music.

WPA honors the rich heritage of gospel music while seeking to connect performers and audiences of all faiths and backgrounds through their love for this art form with dedicated programs.

Founded by former Director of Gospel Programming, Eric Torain, in partnership with President Emeritus Doug Wheeler, our resident gospel choirs—Men and Women of the Gospel (MWTG) and Children of the Gospel (COTG)—have inspired audiences and nurtured both aspiring and experienced vocalists while bringing powerful messages of hope to the most prominent stages in the region for over 25 years. Observing our gospel music program’s 25th anniversary, we began seeking even more ways to reflect WPA’s organizational motto: “Everybody in, nobody out.” We decided to pursue further opportunities to enrich the gospel choir experience for both the choir members and the broader community.

We have amplified our investment in gospel music as a unique entry point for arts education. Today, we are building upon an existing structure with a proven record of success. We have sought and implemented the advice of nationally recognized leaders in gospel music; introduced new artistic and administrative staff to support the choirs; expanded program curricula; and developed a clear set of goals and outcomes to guide multi-year growth.

Each year, we commit more than \$250,000—20% of our arts education budget—to gospel music programming. With your support, we will continue to provide the highest quality vocal training and education, as well as life-changing performance opportunities, all at no cost to participants.

Your contribution will benefit learners of all ages, help us celebrate an American art form through participation and audience engagement, and elevate our commitment to commissioning new works in the gospel music tradition.

Preparing for Excellence

Washington Performing Arts as a Catalyst for Success



We prepare members of our children’s choir for success by teaching them to build leadership and life skills necessary for high achievement both onstage and off. COTG alumni who have chosen careers in the arts have found success in academia and as highly-sought-after performers—in gospel, R&B, and opera—locally and internationally on the world’s most prestigious stages and competitions. Even former members who now work outside of the arts credit COTG in helping them build the discipline, accountability, and collaborative skills that have contributed to their success today.

Our gospel choirs have benefited from exceptional artistic leadership by some of the biggest names in gospel music, including legendary Grammy-winning vocalist, composer, and arranger Richard Smallwood. Today, the choirs are led by Artistic Directors Michele Fowlin (COTG) and Theodore Thorpe, III (MWTG). Both are distinguished, versatile musicians and respected educators with extensive experience in gospel, classical music, R&B, and more. Conductor and composer Stanley J. Thurston, Artistic Director Emeritus, provides artistic consultation in overall strategic program discussions and directs the choirs for special performances.



“COTG helped me to decide what my goals were in life. The experiences traveling, singing with different conductors, singing different styles of music...and getting to develop my sense of artistry...helped me realize I wanted to study music in college.”

Soloman Howard
Alumnus of COTG;
Nationally acclaimed opera singer;
Soloist roster, Metropolitan Opera

Investing in the Future

Washington Performing Arts as an Educator



With members ranging from nine to 70+ years old, Washington Performing Arts' gospel music programs beautifully and powerfully represent both the heritage and future of gospel music. Through these programs, we reinforce our mission-centric commitment to providing opportunities for lifelong learning through high-visibility performances, masterclasses, and workshops with nationally recognized gospel music composers, artists, and directors.

Our resident gospel choirs, the Men and Women of the Gospel Choir (MWTG) and the Children of the Gospel Choir (COTG), are our signature education programs for youth and lifelong learners alike. Both ensembles are highly sought after and have performed for presidents, heads of state, and diplomats at such prestigious venues as the White House, Lincoln Theatre, Washington National Cathedral, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and The Music Center at Strathmore.



COTG's newly-enhanced curriculum is responsive to the needs of developing young musicians. Throughout the season, participants receive instruction in music theory, music history, aural skills, and performance techniques from respected educators and teaching artists.

COTG members are also encouraged to participate in a free vocal intensive where they are fully immersed in the COTG curriculum, building community with their fellow choir members, and preparing a culminating public performance. Students who show exceptional artistic promise can receive private vocal coaching through the Charlotte Schlosberg Vocal Scholarship Program and perform in a public recital for their peers and the greater community.



Sharing Artistry

Washington Performing Arts as a Collaborator

The Washington Performing Arts gospel music program has created a powerful sense of community in Washington, D.C. among people with a passion for gospel music. Over the past few seasons, we have focused on honing and amplifying the choirs' level of artistry by forging new community platforms, partnerships, and collaborations.

We collaborate annually with local partners, including the Washington National Cathedral, Southeast Tennis and Learning Center's Blacks in Wax program, and a host of local churches. A major highlight of our performance season is our annual partnership with Choral Arts Society of Washington to present *Living the Dream...Singing the Dream*, an always-sold-out concert at the Kennedy Center, honoring the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 2017/18, as part of an organizational effort to expand our digital footprint, a number of the choirs' performances were livestreamed to audiences around the world. The gospel choirs' holiday performance on the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage and their Concert Hall performance at Americans for the Arts' Arts Action Summit were streamed to viewers worldwide.

The choirs have also received media attention for their performances that address current societal issues relevant to the D.C. community. *Of Thee We Sing* was a remarkable commemoration of the 75th anniversary of Marian Anderson's powerful performance on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Broadcast locally on DCTV and nationally on BET, it featured performances and readings by Jessye Norman, Dionne Warwick, Wolf Blitzer, the Winans Brothers, MC Hammer, and the premiere of a new work by Ysaye M. Barnwell. Most recently, in celebration of COTG's 25th anniversary, choir members themselves curated an original program, *Stay Woke, Still Woke*: a youth-driven musical exploration of social consciousness and action with repertoire spanning multiple eras, cultures, and genres. The program was featured in a profile by local NPR affiliate WAMU in June 2018.



Artistic Leadership



Michele Fowlin

Artistic Director, Children of the Gospel Choir

Noted vocalist and conductor Michele Fowlin has served as a distinguished music teacher in the public school system for more than 20 years. She is the director of choral programs at Eleanor Roosevelt High School and regularly holds clinics for vocal health, voice and piano master classes, and guest directorships for gospel music workshops. On several occasions, Ms. Fowlin has led COTG in performances for President Obama. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees in vocal performance/pedagogy, with a piano minor, from Howard University.



Theodore Thorpe, III.

Artistic Director, Men and Women of the Gospel Choir

Theodore Thorpe, III. is a celebrated conductor, musical director, vocalist, and composer. He holds a B.A. in music, with a concentration in vocal performance/pedagogy, from Oakwood University and an M.A. in music, with emphasis in choral and orchestral conducting, from Morgan State University. Mr. Thorpe presently serves in his 13th season as music director at Alfred Street Baptist Church and in his ninth year as director of choral activities at TC Williams High School, both in Alexandria, Virginia.



Stanley J. Thurston

*Artistic Director Emeritus,
Washington Performing Arts' Gospel Choirs*

Renowned conductor and composer Stanley J. Thurston has directed the WPA choirs in concert with such artists as BeBe Winans, Kathleen Battle, Ramsay Lewis, Kurt Carr, and Wynton Marsalis. He was commissioned to compose and conduct two works for COTG, including a musical tribute for President Obama's Inaugural Prayer Service in 2009. Mr. Thurston is the founding artistic director of the Heritage Signature Chorale, director of music ministries at Foundry United Methodist Church, and artist-in-residence at Washington National Cathedral.



Your Investment Makes It Happen

Contributions directed to Washington Performing Arts' gospel music programs support...

- Tuition costs and materials for COTG vocal intensive and full-season experience for all members (valued at \$3,500 per student)
- Annual main stage performances
- Masterclasses and music workshops led by renowned artists and music professionals
- Curriculum development
- Exceptional, high-visibility performance opportunities in the greater Washington, DC community
- Artistic leadership
- Rehearsal venue rentals



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To learn more about supporting gospel music programs and main stage performance sponsorship opportunities at Washington Performing Arts, please contact Elizabeth Racheva, Chief Philanthropy Officer, at eracheva@washingtonperformingarts.org or (202) 533-1862.

For booking inquiries, audition information, or details about volunteer opportunities to mentor COTG members, please contact us at gospelchoirs@washingtonperformingarts.org.