



WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2026**

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**WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS ANNOUNCES
MICHELE FOWLIN TO CONCLUDE 20-YEAR TENURE WITH
THE CHILDREN OF THE GOSPEL CHOIR AT THE
END OF THE 2026/27 PROGRAMMING SEASON**

*Fowlin, Artistic Director for the past decade, to continue with
Washington Performing Arts in an emeritus capacity.*



WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 1, 2026) Washington Performing Arts announced today that Michele Fowlin, Artistic Director of the Children of the Gospel Choir (COTG), will conclude her tenure at the close of the 2026-2027 season. Her final season caps 20 years of service to the choir, the last 10 as Artistic Director, and marks a milestone moment in the history of the organization's 33-year-old gospel music program. Following her final season, Fowlin will continue her relationship with Washington Performing Arts in an emeritus capacity, supporting the program through select projects and special initiatives.

Over two decades, Fowlin has mentored generations of young singers from across the Washington, D.C., region, guiding students not only toward musical excellence but through some of the most formative moments of their lives. Under her artistic leadership and with significant investment from Washington Performing Arts and its community, COTG has continued its founding promise of free vocal training for young people, performing on stages ranging from Washington National Cathedral to The White House, and reaching national audiences through appearances on NPR and NBC's *Today Show*. Singers, families, alumni, colleagues, and audiences alike cherish Fowlin, and she leaves a lasting mark on the program: a culture of excellence, belonging, and joy rooted in the transformative power of the uniquely American art form of gospel music.

“For 20 years, this choir has been one of the greatest joys of my life. I've watched children grow into incredible young adults and witnessed how the power of gospel music has transformed lives, strengthened community, and created space for young people to discover both their voices and themselves,” said **Fowlin**. “Good leadership is not only about building something meaningful; it is also about recognizing when it is time to entrust it to someone else. I have every confidence that this legacy will continue for generations to come.”

For Washington Performing Arts' leadership, the moment is one of gratitude—and of confidence in what comes next.

“As leader of our Children of the Gospel Choir, Michele has deeply enriched a treasured legacy ensemble and program at the intersection of artistry, faith, community, and youth empowerment,” said Washington Performing Arts President & CEO **Jenny Bilfield**. “At every turn, she has brought incredible skill, heart, vision, and outstanding musical leadership—helping young singers find their confidence, trust in their own voice, and stretch to new heights. Washington Performing Arts is deeply grateful for Michele's contribution to this legacy. COTG is positioned to move forward in strength as a destination for young singers and audiences in our region, and we are delighted that her artistry and mentorship will continue in her new role as Artistic Director Emerita.”

David G. Powell, as Director of Washington Performing Arts Gospel Music Programs—and an alumnus of the Children of the Gospel Choir himself—continues to steward the artistic and operational activities of the ensemble and program alongside Washington Performing Arts President & CEO Jenny Bilfield, Senior Manager of Choir Operations Kathy Brewington, and Recruitment & Production Coordinator for Gospel Music Programs Tevin Price.

“Having experienced this choir first as a member, then as an alum, staff member, and now Director, I have had the unique privilege over the years of seeing firsthand the indelible imprint of our Artistic Director,” said **Powell**. “She has inspired me as a musician and leader, challenged this choir to believe in what is possible, and elevated the advocacy and storytelling of what young people can do. Her legacy is not simply measured in concerts or accomplishments, but in the generations of 'lamb kings and queens' she has inspired and the higher standard she has set for all of us who follow. I am deeply grateful to her and celebrate this milestone and her next step forward.”

The announcement comes as the gospel music program benefits from its deepest leadership bench in years. Alongside Powell, Brewington, and Price—himself an alumnus of COTG—Anthony “Tony” Walker, Music Director of the Washington Performing Arts Gospel Choirs, anchors the ensembles from the piano and keyboard, and Karon Johnson, Choreographer, has made movement a signature element of the choirs’ performances. Alumni from the program’s first 33 years now form a third ensemble, the Children of the Gospel Alumni Choir, drawing on their shared experience.

As the only arts organization in the nation with resident gospel choirs, Washington Performing Arts builds community through gospel music, creating space for storytelling, expanding access, and opening doors of opportunity for young artists across the region. Looking ahead, an advisory committee of internal and external members will identify a cohort of DMV-based Associate Artistic Directors to lead the choir into its next chapter.

“When I first came to know Washington Performing Arts, the gospel programming touched me deeply, because this musical genre is rooted in faith and community,” said Board Chair **Trista Colbert**. “It is a big part of what drew me to serve on this board, and it remains one of the reasons I am so committed to this organization today.”

“The talented youth who form the Children of the Gospel Choir are not just performers,” Colbert continued. “They are the next generation of storytellers and leaders, and watching them grow in skill and confidence reminds us why arts education remains central to WPA’s mission. Looking ahead, I am grateful that COTG is a cornerstone of who we are, and I am excited for this choir to help write WPA’s next chapter.”

That next chapter builds on deep roots. In 1988, Washington Performing Arts hired a young Howard University graduate, Eric Torain, who brought a rich background in the choral arts, including a deep appreciation of gospel music, and whose programming ideas served the organization’s goals of excellence, innovation, and community building. Among them: producing resident gospel choirs to showcase the area’s own singers and music directors, an idea that then-President Douglas Wheeler, Board Chair Lydia Marshall, and the board embraced. The Men and Women of the Gospel Choir debuted in 1991; the Children of the Gospel Choir followed in 1993.

"The resulting program blossomed, filled a community need, and has lasted more than 30 years," said President Emeritus **Douglas Wheeler**. "The Men and Women of the Gospel and Children of the Gospel choirs have performed annually on the Washington Performing Arts series, at the White House for special events, at presidential inaugurations, at the opening of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain, and at community events too numerous to list."

ABOUT THE WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS GOSPEL CHOIRS

The resident gospel choirs of Washington Performing Arts, Men and Women of the Gospel (MWOTG) 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 33 years. Over that time, the Children of the Gospel Choir

alone has provided free vocal training to thousands of students and made a significant impact on the D.C. community. The Men and Women of the Gospel Choir has celebrated the heritage of gospel music with a wide array of artists, including Richard Smallwood, Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, the late Edwin Hawkins, the late Walter Hawkins, Ramsey Lewis, and Sweet Honey In The Rock. Alumni of the program now perform together as a third ensemble, the Children of the Gospel Alumni Choir.

In addition to annual performances during the Washington Performing Arts presenting season, the choirs perform regularly throughout the community. Past events include the 10th anniversary celebration of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, combined performances with the Choral Arts Chorus for the annual Martin Luther King Jr. tribute concert at the Kennedy Center, Gospel Brunches at the University of Maryland, Christmas concerts at the Washington National Cathedral, featured performances at the historic Howard Theatre, Kennedy Center Millennium Stage, Mayor's Arts Awards, The White House, on NPR's *From The Top*, NBC *Today Show*, Sirius XM Radio, and many more. The choirs made their New York City debut in March 2025.

ABOUT MICHELE FOWLIN

Michele Fowlin has cultivated her love and passion for music from a young age. Fowlin was accepted into the Juilliard School's precollege program for aspiring young musicians as a piano student. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in Vocal Performance/ Pedagogy with a minor in piano from Howard University, where she studied with renowned opera singers Regina McConnell, Carmen Balthrop, and Charlotte Holloman. Under the tutelage of Dr. James Weldon Norris, as Assistant to the Conductor for the University Choirs, she traveled nationally and internationally with the University choir, featured as conductor and lead soloist. She has performed for Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, former President Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama's Let Girls Learn campaign, former Vice Presidents Joe Biden and Al Gore, former Secretary of Defense William Cohen, Ambassador Sasae of Japan, and numerous others. Fowlin is the founder of the Arts/Culture podcast, *The Muses Behind the Music*, and the Associate Director of Contemporary Music at The Washington National Cathedral.

ABOUT DAVID G. POWELL

David G. Powell is a native of Washington, D.C. He came up through the D.C. public school system and graduated from Duke Ellington School of the Arts with a concentration in vocal music. While in D.C., he participated in the Washington Performing Arts Children of the Gospel Choir, The Heritage Signature Chorale under the direction of Stanley Thurston, The Men of Color Chorale, The Sam Bonds Chorale, and Nolan Williams Jr.'s Voices of Inspiration. Powell completed his undergraduate education at The Ohio State University with a double major in Communications and Music. Through his college choir and professor and mentor Raymond Wise, Powell has traveled the United States and several parts of Europe singing and performing. During his time in college, Powell worked in the Office of Undergraduate Admission. His love for music and his enjoyment of guiding prospective college-bound families through the college search process led him to work in the School of Music Admissions Office at the University of Maryland College Park and later as the Director of Admission for Westminster College of the Arts (to include Westminster Choir College) of Rider University. In 2022, Powell

completed his Master of Arts degree in Organizational Leadership from Trevecca University. He serves as the inaugural Director of Gospel Music Programs for Washington Performing Arts and as the Gospel Choir Director at Georgetown University. He believes in and is fully vested in the power of God as seen through the arts, transforming lives, serving, and building strong communities.

ABOUT WASHINGTON PERFORMING ARTS

One of the most established and honored performing arts institutions in America, Washington Performing Arts has engaged for 60 years with artists, audiences, students, and civic life. The city is truly our stage: for decades, in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we have presented a tremendous range of artists and art forms, from the most distinguished symphony orchestras to both renowned and emerging artists in classical music, jazz, international genres, and more. We also have an ever-expanding artistic and educational presence online, envisioning ongoing opportunities for online connection and community.

Washington Performing Arts deeply values its partnerships with local organizations and other arts institutions. Through events online and in myriad performance venues and neighborhoods, we engage international visiting artists in community programs and introduce local artists to wider audiences. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through residencies and education programs.

Our work has earned a National Medal of Arts and three Mayor's Arts Awards from the DC Government. We have now embarked upon our second half-century, ever inspired by the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

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