

## **ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: The Fisk Jubilee Singers**

### **FEATURED PERFORMERS**

#### **The Fisk Jubilee Singers**

Founded in 1871, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were the first Tennessee musical group to gain international prominence, and today they continue to preserve a legacy of remarkable artistic and social significance. Through the Jubilee Singers, the world was introduced to the “Negro Spirituals,” religious folksongs of slavery recast as concert choral pieces in the group’s definitive “jubilee” style. As artistic achievement, their emotive harmonies spawned many overtones. Through them Nashville gained its first notoriety as a city of music. The popularity of their style gave birth to an entire genre of Black performance, emulated by countless other groups.

As home to the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the vocal music program at Fisk University strongly influenced music training at other African American institutions at all levels. But the Jubilee Singers also accomplished much beyond music. As fundraisers for Fisk University, they successfully wed touring student performance to the cause of African American education and financed construction of Jubilee Hall, one of Nashville’s most historic buildings. Their worldwide notoriety greatly enhanced respect for African Americans and support for their advancement in the wake of emancipation, a role of continuing influence on civil rights and Black consciousness in America.

Beginning with the original Jubilee Singers and their founding director George L. White, many prominent musical figures have been associated with the group over the years. Paul Kwami masterfully oversees the tradition of the Jubilee Singers currently.

Recognizing the historical and cultural importance of the African American spiritual, the Tennessee Arts Commission conceived, and continues to fund, a special project commemorating the spirituals and the many contributions of the Fisk Jubilee Singers in preserving this unique art form. Under the American Masterpieces initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Commission has sponsored the Fisk Jubilee Singers in concerts within the state and produced curriculum materials as a lasting resource for Tennessee schools.

Today, the Fisk Jubilee Singers are celebrating their 136<sup>th</sup> anniversary and are an enduring tradition. The ensemble was one of the first six to be inducted into the Music City Walk of Fame in 2006, and received a Folklife Heritage Award during Tennessee’s 2007 Governor’s Awards in the Arts. Through song and spirit they promote peace, tolerance, and understanding among all people.

## **FEATURED PERFORMERS**

### **Abby Burke**

So many of today's divas are the product of marketing campaigns, such is not the case with Abby Burke. She is not just another "manufactured" vocalist. She has it all – a sensational voice, commanding stage presence, statuesque appearance, and an infectious joy for what she does. Abby's musical tastes range from Cabaret to Jazz, Musical Theater to Pop, Country to Classical. She sings with elegance and sensitivity, earning her the respect of Nashville's arts and music community. Her ability to take a tune familiar to many and leave her special imprint on it, has caused her to become a popular artist performing wither band, and with a variety of other professional performing organizations.

### **The Chattanooga Boys Choir**

The mission of the Chattanooga Boys Choir is to positively influence and develop the lives of boys by providing a music program of the highest quality which includes education, appreciation, and performance. The Chattanooga Boys Choir, founded in 1954, remains the oldest boychoir in the southeast. The CBC was started by local residents as a choir of some thirty boys from several schools in the Chattanooga area. The organization now includes over 150 boys from across the Chattanooga area and northwest Georgia in five different ensembles. They represent over sixty different public and private schools, and include several home-schooled students.

From performing sacred masterworks in the great cathedrals of Europe to the National Anthem at the White House and major league baseball games, the choir represents the Chattanooga community around the world, designated by the mayor as Chattanooga's "Ambassadors of Goodwill." Since 1964, the CBC Singing Christmas Tree has ushered in the Holiday Season for all of greater Chattanooga. The Concert Choir, the main performing and touring ensemble of the CBC, has presented concerts in 38 states and in 20 countries across five continents.

### **The Dismembered Tennesseans**

The Dismembered Tennesseans have been Chattanooga's favorite bluegrass band for over 60 years. It started in 1945 among a group of McCallie School students intent on playing traditional string music and continued throughout the original members' careers as prominent local businessmen and professionals. The band has brought on new players in recent decades under the leadership of founding fiddler Fletcher Bright, a 2005 recipient of the Folklife Heritage Award from the Tennessee Arts Commission. Known for their humor as well as their musical chops, the group, as Fletcher jokes, "made their mark singing country music for people who don't particularly like country music," and "played for every local civic group in existence, every charity, and most of the conventions in town looking for cheap entertainment." They've in fact won over converts to bluegrass at all levels of Chattanooga society and amassed impressive performance credentials along the way on both the regional and national levels.

### **The Chattanooga Choral Society for the Preservation of African American Song**

The Chattanooga Choral Society for the Preservation of African American Song is a group formed for the purpose of preserving the rich heritage of African American songs with special emphasis on the Negro spirituals. This diverse group is comprised of approximately 45 members with different professional backgrounds including students, professors, professional musicians, and others that all share a love of music and a desire to perform it with an emphasis on quality. CCSPAAS traces its beginning to informal gatherings of former students, church choir members, and friends of the late [Edmonia Johnson Simmons](#). Mrs. Simmons taught music at the Howard High School in Chattanooga for nearly four decades, and served as music director for several area churches.

Concert programs indicate that as early as 1974, the name Chattanooga Choral Society was used in presentations by the group. In 1984, the formal organization of the chorus was announced as a unit of the Chattanooga African American Heritage Museum. The first concert was presented in November 17, 1984, at the First Baptist Church (East Eight Street). The program was an overwhelming success. Since that time, the ensemble has performed bi-annual concerts – fall and spring – and for schools, community service, religious and professional organizations and conferences throughout the state. CCSPAAS is presently under the direction of distinguished conductor, composer, arranger, Dr. Roland Carter; a Howard alumnus and Simmons protégé. Carter assumed directorship of the group in 1990, shortly after he returned to Chattanooga to accept the appointment as Head of the Cadek Department of Music and Conservatory at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.