



trenton

# DOWNTOWNER

What's Happening in Trenton

JANUARY 2004

## TRENTON SPEAKS

Trentonians reveal  
six issues for the  
new year



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Gospel music: a conduit for multicultural awareness

**See reverse side**

## Gospel music: a conduit for multicultural awareness

**I**MAGINE a multicultural (all races; all religions) choir singing Black Gospel music under the direction of one of the most talented and exciting African-American choir directors in the world. People have come from miles around just to hear them perform. Their voices are amazing! The audience is awestruck as they cannot believe their ears or their eyes. It is an unforgettable experience.

Am I describing a dream or reality? The fact is that there are multicultural experiences like this occurring all over the world! Another fact is that these experiences, though widespread, are scarce; and, an invisible barrier presents itself as the “norm” that precludes this wonderful music from penetrating the boundaries that society has allowed to be erected, keeping it segregated among predominately black house of worship experiences and southern (white) gospel churches.

Not too long ago it was documented by one of the major television networks that Asians come to America to learn Gospel music and return home to their native land, where it continues to flourish. More importantly, they imitate the music to the finite degree, while unable to speak or master the English language.

The spirit projected by Gospel music is unexplainable. It is a music that apparently permeates the inner soul into an obvious outer joyousness. If sung properly, another fact is that anyone of any nationality or culture can express and feel this joy. It is apparent that you don’t need to be black to sing Gospel music. My question then is, “How does one go about mak-

ing this experience come to life for all types of people?”

I was raised in the Midwest. My religious training was basically in the Lutheran church. I have never had a Gospel singing experience and I am African American. In our Lutheran Hymnals, we sang “Negro Spirituals.” No matter how hard the Choir Director tried, our singing never generated the exuberance that one may glean, while listening to a true, Gospel choir.

Now that I am in my midyears, I am amazed that more congregations have not merged together, nor have they included this music in their worship services. The diversity that we constantly preach about seems to still be lacking in the department of religion. Although many have tried to build bridges to connect religious constituencies, the boundaries and stereotypes still exist.

In today’s times music seems to veer further and further from its roots. We have lost the essence of important music history. Hip-hop is recognized as “black” music. Many children, not of color, do not know that there is, or ever was, such a thing called Gospel music. It is easy for them to identify with “black” music through white hip-hop artists, as well as blacks, who head the music charts.

How is it that we know more about jazz? Somehow we find jazz in our college years. If not by student peers and campus concerts, then we tend to find the smooth, mellow sounds of jazz by osmosis. It simply is

there. Perhaps jazz is more prominent as contemporary documentaries on the subject continue to be produced.

When it comes to finding Gospel music, it may be by chance. Some colleges and universities have taken it upon themselves to “push the bar” by creating diverse, multicultural Gospel choirs, which are revered and have loyal audiences. A lot of them don’t. Many of the state K-12 schools have lost educational dollars for extensive music programs that may have included Gospel music. There is also the emerging issue of “separation of Church and State.” For a lucky few, Gospel music may have evolved on the home front through generations of household staff for the grandparents, parents or in the current environs. Movies have also been a source for witnessing the Gospel experience.

I believe that educating the young and the old alike with Gospel music may instill core music values and at the same time break down stereotypes and barriers through this universal language. If enough people in the world felt the Gospel spirit, with the ensuing fellowship, and through song, a new sense of community may be born. Now, isn’t this a powerful concept?

After surviving the events of 9/11, and after a year and a half of deep soul-searching and healing, I wanted to make a difference in my life and that of others. I wanted people to feel the spirit of life! With a change of jobs and working lifestyle, I

decided to approach my boss, Johnny Morris of WIMG/Morris Broadcasting, with one of my dreams. I called it the Black Gospel Awareness (BGA) Project. That was a little over a year ago.

Today, after a general public audition in October, 2003, we have approximately 150 singers (multi-cultural; multi-racial) from the age of eight through adult, who come to us from as far away as New York, south Jersey to suburban Philadelphia, east to the ocean and west to parts of Pennsylvania. The BGA Project is alive; the response has been amazing!

Under the direction of Betty Young of Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, and her talented musical team, the BGA Project Choir is rehearsing, except for December, in preparation for their once-in-a-lifetime performance on Saturday, February 28, 2004 at 8 p.m. at the Princeton University Chapel. Their sound is unbelievable!

We expect that this event will highlight the climax of Black History Month 2004 in a memorable and historic way. Tickets are now on sale at all Sun National Bank branches in Mercer County, as well as Amoroso Flower Shop, RF Gallery, Jeff the Printer and WIMG in Trenton, Christine Joseph Hair Salon in Ewing, The Front Porch in Pennington and Westminster Choir College in Princeton. For more information visit [www.wimg1300.com](http://www.wimg1300.com) or contact Pamela Pruitt at (609) 695 1300, Ext. 14.

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by Pamela Pruitt