

Gospel ensemble receives invite to sing at Carnegie Hall next year

By Pete Whelan
Of the Emerald

The University Gospel Ensemble will travel to New York City next May to perform at Carnegie Hall during Gospel Week, an event sponsored by Cultural Omnibus International (COI).

The 125-member choir's five-day stay will include performances aboard the aircraft carrier Intrepid and at Lincoln Center's Damrosch Shell, said ensemble Director John Gainer.

COI's interest in the ensemble stems primarily from the fact that the University group is predominantly non-black, yet sings black gospel music as if it were an all-black gospel choir, said Gainer, an adjunct music instructor who has been directing the choir for three years.

Most of the choir was shocked to hear that it was to perform at Carnegie Hall.

"When he told us we almost fell flat on the floor," said Kathleen Klosterman, choir member and accompanying pianist. "What an honor, you know, the Beatles have performed there."

Klosterman first got involved with the group after hearing one of their performances. "I heard the gospel choir perform, and I knew right then and there that that was the group I wanted to be in," she said.

The music is more challenging than other types of music because "you're using your voice to the fullest extent. I wouldn't say you're yelling, but you're using a lot of strength to sing," she said.

The news also came as a shock to choir member David Girley.

"Is he for real? Us? Eugene, Oregon? I

couldn't believe it," he said.

Of the choir, Girley said, "It's like a big family, you know, no one is better than anyone else, and we're out there to have a good time and praise the Lord and sing."

Before revealing news of the invitation, Gainer told the group he had been accepted into the architecture program and was thinking of leaving the choir, said Kyle Lewis, choir pianist.

"Of course, everybody groaned, and then he said, 'But we've just been invited to Carnegie Hall so I think I'll stay on,' and then everybody just went through the roof," he said.

Along with many of the choir members, Girley believes Gainer's natural ability and unique teaching methods separate their group from the ordinary choir.

"He's one of those gifted persons that can sing and play by ear and by music," Girley said. "That was a natural God-given gift to him that he had. He gives you room to use your voice and listen to your ear."

Klosterman agreed that Gainer is the choir's driving force.

"I think that John makes us exert an energy that not many other groups have, and he just knows how to get everybody's attention focused on him," she said. "We don't have music at all. He teaches us a line at a time, and he sings all the parts himself, and we just listen to him and sing it back."

When three-year choir member Doni Coon was asked why she thought the choir was picked above other choir groups across the nation, she exclaimed, "Because we're good!"

Canadian horse-drawn troupe performs

Eugene just experienced something unique.

The Caravan Stage Company, a theater group from British Columbia, Canada, performed at Amazon Park this past weekend.

The group is finishing its three-year tour through California, Oregon and Washington. The 16-year-old company will culminate its tour at Expo '86 in Vancouver, B.C.

The 28-member company travels on five horse-drawn wagons that trek five miles an hour. The company camps in large fields located near performance areas.

"The Caravan is healthy physically and mentally," said Mimi Doyka, caravan administrator and performer. "It's almost like running off with the circus. Most members are at a point in their lives where they have a lot of freedom to travel around for a while."

The performance area is an open-air tent, and the wagons are used as part of the stage.

The company's scripts, songs, costumes and decorations are "bigger than life and cartoonlike," said costume designer and actress Christine Thomson.

While traveling south, the company performed the musicals, "Hands Up" and "The Coyotes," two original productions that Eugene residents could have seen during the summer of 1984. This year the company is performing Easy Street, a spoof on TV game shows, and Manifold Destiny, a science fantasy about automobiles.

"We draw crowds of all ages, and it is interesting to note that a lot of the people who came to see us had never been to a theater show before," Doyka said.

Providing entertainment is not the sole purpose of the group, however. Its musicals contain obvious political and social messages that are pertinent to Canada as well as the United States, Doyka said.

An example of this was Vancouver's "clean up the city" campaign in preparation for Expo '86, Doyka said. City officials kicked the poor people out of the city in order to preserve its good image and gave prospective jobs to outsiders — people in other provinces, she said.

Angered by the injustice to poor people, the company included a few scenes in Easy

Street that ridiculed Vancouver's actions, she said.

After the Caravan finishes its stint at Expo, the company plans to travel to Nicaragua.



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