

# RELIGION

## ADA Hosts Gospel Concert To Fight Diabetes

Gospel's best raised their voices to fight diabetes at "A Celebration of Gospel," held recently in Los Angeles. Proceeds from the concert will benefit the American Diabetes Association's (ADA) African American Outreach Program and the Black Church Diabetes Education Program.

Blue Cross of California was honored at the event for its sponsorship of the Black Church Diabetes Education Program. The program coordinates efforts with 200 churches throughout Los Angeles, targeting 50,000 members. The goal of the program is to create an awareness about the problem of diabetes among African Americans as a community health issue that affects everyone.

"This was a special night for gospel fans," said Carolyn Hairston, ADA's outreach coordinator for the African American community. "Many of these performers have been personally touched by diabetes. They graciously agreed to help us by performing at the concert and joining the fight against a disease that affects so many African Americans."

Gospel greets who donated

their time and talent to the event included the Clark Sisters, Rev. Daryl Coley, Merry Clayton, the Starlights, Norman Hutchins and Tony Warren.

Diabetes is the third leading cause of death by disease among African Americans. Twice as many cases of the disease surface in members of this ethnic group than in their white counterparts of the same age. Beyond age 65, there are nearly three times as many cases of diabetes in blacks as in whites, with the majority of cases affecting women.

The American Diabetes Association is the nation's leading voluntary health organization supporting diabetes research and education. It serves the entire community through the efforts of thousands of volunteers from more than 800 affiliates and local chapters in communities throughout the United States.

For more information about how to develop a Black Church Diabetes Education Program, please call Carolyn Hairston, ADA at (213) 381-3639.

## PSU Religion Center To Expand

The Center for the Study of Religion at Portland State University recently received a \$20,000 grant from the Collins Foundation.

The money will be used to create new space for the center and pay for computers and internet access.

The computer hook-up will provide a "virtual library" with access to books and periodicals from all over the world and eventually to become a clearinghouse of written materials and videos to respond to local and regional needs for the study of religion.

The center was opened in 1993 and is located across from the PSU campus at 633 S.W. Montgomery. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to education regarding the world's religions, including Jewish, Muslim,

Christian, Buddhist and Hindu.

Center participants are dedicated to critical and scholarly inquiry into areas of mutual interest within each of the faiths.

"Religions, religious oppressions and reactions for and against religious influences have powered important social and political events throughout history," said Rev. Phil Harder, president of the center and an ecumenical minister.

Harder said there are current divisive social issues upon which religion and ethics have a bearing.

"We hope to explore these events and issues from a variety of spiritual perspectives and to promote constructive dialogue and coexistence among faiths and between the

churched and un-churched," he said.

Spring classes include: Approaches to Religion (Philosophy), Women's Spirituality and Feminist Theology (Women's Studies), The Bible as Literature (English), The Religious Reformations of the 16th Century (History), and Literature and Theology (English). Future classes include Cosmologies: Past and Present; Living Religions of the World; plus others that will explore religion and the environment, the family, gender and health.

The center also sponsors a steady stream of lectures and discussions.

The center's 24-member board of directions is comprised of Portland Campus Ministry staff, ordained

and lay religious leaders from the community, administrators and faculty from PSU, Marylhurst College, University of Portland, Warner Pacific College and Western Evangelical Seminary.

It's supported primarily through grants and donations and through the mostly donated work of its members.

"The make-up of the center's board of directors underscores our belief in diversity," said Harder. "In addition to scholars, university faculty and clergy, we have an artist, a professional clown, an insurance agent, a student, a housewife and a community organizer. Such variety guarantees that our exploration of religions and issues is an adventure."

For more information, contact Harder at 226-7807.

## The Gospel According To Fontella Bass

BY PEARL VAMBRACE

Move over, world. Fontella Bass is back. And according to the title of her latest album, she's "No Ways Tired."

Fontella Bass was born into the world of gospel. Her St. Louis upbringing under the charge of her mother, the singer Martha Bass who was a protegee of Willie Mae Ford Smith and toured with the renowned Clara Ward Singers, and grandmother Nevada Carter, another significant voice in gospel, found Bass honing her piano-playing skills at the age of five in funeral parlors, later accompanying and singing with her mother and grandmother on tours throughout the South and in churches nearer home. Little did she know then that twenty years later, in 1965, she would record a smash R&B single, netting her a gold record and a dizzying place atop Billboard Magazine's pop and R&B charts. That single was "Rescue Me." But a lot happened to Bass before the phenomenal success of the song, and even more has gone on in the thirty years since.

During her teenage years, Fontella Bass continued playing religious music and employed her considerable instrumental skills as organist and pianist for a number of

churches in St. Louis, but it was through the influence and encouragement of her grandfather and two uncles, all active blues musicians, that she was first drawn to perform music outside of the church. In the ensuing years of her early adulthood, Fontella would be invited to perform and record with such musical greats as Little Milton, Oliver Sain, Albert King, Muddy Waters and Bobby McClure. She recorded for Ike Turner's label, Bobbin and ultimately Chicago's Chess Records, where "Rescue Me" was first brought to life -- and to the attention of the world.

But in the years following, Bass, who had married trumpeter Lester Bowie in the early 1960's and borne the first of their four children to come, became disenchanted with the record business. She spent the 1970's in France and then back in St. Louis, continuing to perform in both locations but focusing more on her family life and on the gospel music most strongly associated with it. "Gospel was something I ran away from, because I was raised on it," Bass says, "but I finally realized that music is about emotion and feeling, and it really doesn't have anything to do with labels... Gospel is music I know totally, and the music I'm most relaxed with. I can just sit down at the piano and really be creative."

"There are a lot of people getting on the gospel boat, thinking it's a fad. I don't have anything against them. I just think it's something that should be felt by the person who's singing it. That's what makes it pure. What comes from the heart reaches the heart."

Fontella Bass' new gospel album on Nonesuch Records' American Explorer series, "No Ways Tired," is a joyous and roof-shaking celebration of these musical roots. Backed by such headlining talents as David Sanborn, World Saxophone Quartet's Hamiett Bluiett, and Lester Bowie (now her ex-husband, amicably), Bass works a combination of vocal power and tenderness to heart-warming and foot-tapping effect, producing such highlights as "Everlasting Arms", "This Little Light of Mine", The album's title track and "This Place I Call Home," which Bass herself wrote. Said Bluiett of his first collaboration with bass (WSQ's 1994 album, "Breath of Life"), "She came in and started singing 'Suffering with the Blues' at the

piano, in perfect B flat. Without stopping, she went to the piano and began accompanying herself, still in perfect pitch. Everyone sat there with his mouth wide open."

The vocal abilities so evident in her 20's have come to full maturity at 54; the flourishing range and the elevated expressiveness reveal an artist clearly at the height of her powers. "They say it takes twenty years," she remarks, "to come into whatever career you get into... There's no substitute for experience."

About the numerous ongoing request she gets for "Rescue Me" she says, "I don't mind. I wouldn't want to be where I am without that song. I get that over with. And then I do Fontella. Right now I want to work! Some singers my age are sung out. Not Fontella. The voice is yet young."

To Advertise in The Portland Observer, call (503) 288-0033.

### 25th Anniversary CELEBRATION of The Portland Observer

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(503) 240-PRAY

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PASTORS: Bishop Robert Simpson, Jr. • Dr. Ida M. Simpson

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Church Phone: 289-0147 • Study Phone: 289-1911

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