

Choir

continued from page 1

run the gamut. There's one that is a Christmas spiritual, although most people don't think of it as such, "Children Go Where I Send Thee." There's one, "My Soul Has Been Anchored in the Lord," by Moses Hogan; the message speaks for itself. There's an original by one of our members, Cora Jackson, called "Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey," which is something that you often hear from our elders in church, that they've been through hard times but they say, 'I wouldn't take nothing for my journey.'

And "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," what many people call the Negro National Anthem. It's actually the Negro National Hymn. But be that as it may it's a great piece, and we open the program with that one. "Even Me" takes us back to the point in time when the enslaved ones would say, 'pass me not oh gentle savior, lord I hear of showers of blessings, so while all that's going on would you send some my way please?'

"Soon I Will be Done" is an arrangement that I've done which refers to the enslaved



Juan Huey-Ray

ones looking forward to a day when they no longer were confronted by the kind of things they were going through on a daily basis. Back in those days death was the portal, if you will, to a better life, and that's what the song is essentially about. Today people resort to drugs and alcohol and suicide and all those kinds of things because they can't cope with the pressures of life. The

enslaved Africans didn't have all that at their disposal. All they had was hope and faith. And they survived.

TSN: In what ways can we in the community support your work?

Huey-Ray: For the purpose of this trip, funds are needed. You don't get paid to go to Carnegie Hall. Not all of our 50 people are able to pay the total cost. Every one has raised funds, and at this point we have raised over \$25,000 toward that total cost. So donations are certainly needed.

Although the concert is in February we have to have all the funds raised by Dec. 15. They can go to our website at [\[alpursuits.org\]\(http://alpursuits.org\) to make donations there, and on Facebook.](http://www.cultur-</p>
</div>
<div data-bbox=)

TSN: Talk about your longer-term vision of starting an educational institution.

Huey-Ray: We want to launch an academy that teaches the three "r's" – readin', writin' and 'rithmetic, as the old folks used to say, and we're going to do it using the Negro spiritual. Because you've got to count in music. And there is so much to the Negro spiritual that is overlooked, people tend to think about the religious aspects of



The Choir

whole linguistic side of this that has never been approached. How did they communicate amongst themselves? How did the music take root in enslaved populations? There are so many legends about spirituals having double meanings and messages coded into them – but how did that get disseminated, if you will? So there's history to be learned from the study of the Negro spiritual. There's mathematics to be learned from the study of the spiritual; linguistics to be learned. There are all kinds of things that are useful today, in addition to the hope that these songs inspired.

The Sound of the Northwest performs, "Views from the Past, Hope for the Future,"

The music that poured out of their souls can be refreshing and reviving for people today

it, but if you stopped to think – we're talking about people who were brought here who did not speak English. So there's a

Lowery

continued from page 1

nance. And they survived because of their faith, and because God showed up in that furnace with them.

"Now, Dr. Lowery said that those three young men were a little bit crazy. But there's a difference, he said, between good crazy and bad crazy. Those boys, he said, were 'good crazy.' At the time, I was running for president – it was early in the campaign. Nobody gave me much of a chance. He turned to me from the pulpit, and indicated that someone like me running for president – well, that was crazy. But he supposed it was good crazy."

Without the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery Voting Rights March that originated at Brown Chapel in Selma, Barack Obama would not be in the White House, a fact the president freely acknowledges.

As much as President Obama has lauded Lowery, from selecting him to deliver the benediction at his inauguration to awarding him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award in the nation, that's not where Lowery made his greatest contribution. His greatest impact was breaking down racial barriers in the Deep South and giving African-Americans hope, even hope that one day an African-American family would live in the White House.

I know that from personal experience. Growing up Black in Tuscaloosa, Ala. during the 1950s and early 1960s meant riding in the "colored" section at the back of the bus. It meant drinking from separate water fountains and using "colored" restrooms. America's version of apartheid didn't allow African-Americans – actually, we called ourselves Negroes back then – to try on clothes in department stores or eat in the same restaurants as Whites. A decade after Brown v. Board of Education, we attended separate schools and lived in different neighborhoods.

I was thrilled when Lowery, Dr. King, Abernathy, Andy Young, James Orange, Jim Bevel, Harold Middlebrook, Dick Gregory and other civil rights warriors would come to Tuscaloosa to support T.Y. Rogers, the head of our local SCLC chapter. They instilled deep pride in me and thousands like me. We dreamed of a better day and that day was realized because of the

work of Lowery and others with an abundance of courage and dedication.

President Obama said at the CBC, "Dr. Lowery – I don't think he minds me telling that he turns 90 in a couple weeks. He's been causing a ruckus for about 89 of those years."

Although I didn't know it while growing up during that tumultuous period, I would get to know Lowery later in life. In addition to both of us being from Alabama, we also share the same alma mater – Knoxville College in Tennessee. Two years ago, I gave

"I worried about my family sometimes. But worry about my own well-being was minimal because I felt I was answering a call. I am thankful that He stayed with me"

the commencement address at Alabama A&M University, when Lowery was presented an honorary doctorate. As a journalist, I've interviewed him dozens of times, but none were as special as the 1-hour conversation we had on Wednesday, the same day Fred Shuttlesworth died in Birmingham at the age of 89. With Dr. King, Ralph Abernathy, Hosea Williams and now Shuttlesworth deceased, not many old civil rights warriors remain on the scene. Only Lowery, C.T. Vivian, Andrew Young and a few other stalwarts remain.

When I asked Lowery how he was able to remain on the civil rights battlefield so long, he replied: "I felt a calling and because I felt God called me to work in the struggle, He would be with me. So, I didn't feel alone. I worried about my family sometimes. But worry about my own well-being was minimal because I felt I was answering a call. I am thankful that He stayed with me."

That faith was evident when Lowery and his wife of 64 years, Evelyn, got involved in the case of Tommy Lee Hines in Decatur, Ala. Hines, who at 25 was diagnosed with the IQ of a 6-year-old, was accused of raping three White women in 1978. Hines did

not attend school until he was 20 and was unable to assist in his own defense. He was found guilty by an all-White jury and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

"Tommy Lee Hines was mentally handicapped," Lowery explained. "He couldn't ride a bicycle yet they accused him of driving a car when he raped these women."

Lowery, then president of SCLC, help lead a protest that summer in Decatur. Ku Klux Klan Imperial Wizard Bill Wilkenson rallied his local forces.

"The news media came and said, 'The

Klan is waiting downtown and they say they're going to kill you,'" Lowery recalled. "I still went on. I probably should have said, 'We're going to go tomorrow.'"

After reaching downtown Decatur, the protesters were beaten and three were shot, though not fatally. Because of the heightened danger, women were not allowed to march that day. Mrs. Lowery followed demonstrators in a car. One bullet pierced her windshield, prompting her to duck. While her head was down, a second bullet whizzed past the steering wheel.

Like her husband, Mrs. Lowery accepted the danger that accompanied ground-breaking civil rights work.

"It was a narrow escape, but I knew that we were all in together," she told Atlanta Woman magazine. "I was part of the Civil Rights Movement and I became very focused. I knew why God had put me here."

After being attacked by the KKK in Decatur, Joseph Lowery returned the next day with 10,000 additional marchers.

Of the many civil rights struggles he has been engaged in, Lowery doesn't hesitate when asked about the one that stands out most.