



THE CHORAL TRIBUTES TO DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. Event History

The Choral Arts Society of Washington, and Artistic Director Norman Scribner, first organized memorial concerts in honor of Dr. King in the year following his assassination. The Tributes were initiated, in Scribner's words, "...to give musical and visual reality to the message that we are all brothers and sisters. As an avid music lover, Dr. King understood the tremendous force that music exerts upon the human will." Since the establishment of the MLK national holiday in 1989, Choral Arts has presented an Annual Choral Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

The Tributes bring together individuals from all segments of the community on stage and in the audience as a reminder of Dr. King's ideals of non-violence, racial equality and peace. This concert is sign-interpreted upon request and has a low admission fee to stimulate broad participation from the metropolitan community. More than 250 complimentary tickets are provided annually to youth organizations, homeless shelters, mentor organizations and DC public schools.

Associated Activities

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee, comprised of a cross-section of the city's corporate, religious, education and community leaders, is responsible for the annual event's oversight, coordination and fundraising. It conducts one planning meeting prior to the concert and one "wrap-up" session following the Tribute in January or February.

Lawyers' Leadership Committee

Initiated in 2009, the Lawyers' Leadership Committee includes individual lawyers and law firms from throughout the city that support this event through their sponsorship and commitment to working for justice, civil rights and equal opportunity for all through civic harmony and non-violence.

Honorary Committee

The Honorary Committee consists of local and national government and religious leaders as well as other public figures who support the Tribute. Past Honorary Committee members include Bishop Desmond Tutu, Senator Barak Obama, Dr. Dorothy Height and Mayor Adrian Fenty.

Free Pre-Concert Activities

- 1995 – Dr. Doris McGinty, chair, Music History Department, Howard University
- 1996 – The Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, civil rights leader

1997 – Dr. Ysaye Maria Barnwell, member, Sweet Honey In The Rock
1998 – Kim and Reggie Harris, black history/civil rights history educators
1999 – Matthew Jones, Marshall Jones, and Emory Harris, The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) FREEDOM SINGERS
2000 – Jack Landrón, civil rights activist, actor, singer/songwriter, storyteller
2001 – Gwendolyn Briley-Strand, actor/singer, portrayed Harriet Tubman in story and song
2002 – Dorothy Mains-Prince, oral interpretation of civil rights activist Ida B. Wells Barnett
2003 – Kim and Reggie Harris, black history/civil rights history educators
2004 – Odetta, civil rights activist and folk singer
2005 – The Warsaw Village Band
2006 – Urban Nation H.I.P-H.O.P. Choir
2007 – Urban Nation H.I.P-H.O.P. Choir
2008 – N/A
2009 – N/A
2010 – N/A

Honorary Chairs

1990 – Barbara Bush
1991 – Barbara Bush
1992 – Sharon Pratt Kelly
1993 – Sharon Pratt Kelly
1994 – Sharon Pratt Kelly
1995 – Eleanor Holmes Norton
1996 – Sheila Johnson
1997 – Eleanor Holmes Norton
1998 – Martin Luther King III
1999 – Al and Tipper Gore
2000 – Anthony A. Williams
2001 – John Lewis
2002 – Maynard Jackson
2004 – Alexis Herman
2005 – Anthony A. Williams
2006 – H. Patrick Swygert
2007 – N/A
2008 – N/A
2009 – N/A
2010 – Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Celebrity Masters of Ceremonies

1989 – Renée Poussaint
1990 – Renée Poussaint
1991 – Renée Poussaint
1992 – Renée Poussaint
1993 – Renée Poussaint
1994 – Al Freeman, Jr.
1995 – Jim Vance
1996 – Bev Smith and Angela Stribling
1997 – Susan Kidd
1998 – Renee Poussaint

1999 – Phylcia Rashad
2000 – Togo West
2001 – Avery Brooks
2002 – Debbie Allan
2003 – Jennifer Cover Payne
2004 – Leon Harris
2005 – Leon Harris
2006 – Leon Harris and Kathleen Matthews
2007 – Leon Harris
2008 – Ben Vereen
2009 – Jermaine Crawford
2010 – Reverend Juan P. Guthrie, master of ceremonies; Cynné Simpson, host

Humanitarian Award Winner

2004 – Dr. Dorothy Height
2005 – John Lewis
2006 – Marian Wright Edelman
2007 – Harris Wofford
2008 – Julian Bond
2009 – John Doar
2010 – Charlayne Hunter-Gault

Student Guides

Free eight-page student guides are distributed to more than 500 students prior to the performance. Guides are also available at the pre-concert lecture and at the entrance of the concert hall.

Complimentary Tickets

More than 250 tickets are provided annually to youth organizations, homeless shelters, mentor organizations and DC public schools. Participants in the complimentary ticket program receive free student guides with their tickets.

Ticket Price

The ticket price was \$10 from 1989 to 2000, \$15 from 2000 to 2007 and increased to \$20 in 2008. The price remains low in order to make the event accessible to individuals throughout the Greater Washington, DC community.

VIP Reception

Prior to the Tribute concert, Choral Arts holds a VIP Reception for committee members, donors, community leaders, members of Congress, ambassadors, and members of the DC City Council.

Commemorative CD and Booklets

For the 10th anniversary concert, a commemorative CD featuring selected performance pieces from past Tributes was produced. The CD was released in the Fall of 1998. A booklet detailing the history of the event was created in commemoration of the 10th and 15th Annual Tributes.

Voices Publication

For the 20th anniversary concert, Choral Arts partnered with Dalmatian Press to publish a commemorative book/CD set featuring photos, reflections on the civil rights movement, and selected performances from the first 19 years of the Tribute. *Voices: Reflections on an American Icon through Words and Song* was released in late Fall of 2007. The Choral Arts Society of Washington produced a companion teacher's curriculum, *Voices: A Teacher's Guide* which was distributed free of charge to all DC schools during February of 2008.

Martin Luther King Tribute Commissions

The Choral Arts Society has commissioned new works by many renowned composers for the Tributes to Dr. King. The first commission, entitled *Once: In Memoriam MLK*, was written by Thomas Beveridge for the 1969 performance. Adolphus Hailstork wrote a piece called *Stages* in recognition of the 10th anniversary of the Annual Tributes in 1998 and to honor the memory of Dr. Charles Epps, III, past chair and long-time steward of the event. The performance in 1999 featured *His Light Still Shines*, a new work written by pianist, conductor and arranger Moses Hogan, and *The Dreamer*, by Glenn Edward Burleigh, was premiered at the concert in 2000. New York composer Nicholas White wrote *Full Freedom* for the 2002 performance, and the 2003 tribute featured *Truth Pressed to Earth, Shall Rise* by Dr. Ysaye Maria Barnwell.