

GENEVA CONCERTS



PRESENTS

FISK

JUBILEE SINGERS®



Saturday, November 4, 2023 • 7:30 p.m.
Smith Opera House

GENEVA CONCERTS

2023-2024 SEASON

Saturday, September 23, 2023 at 7:30 pm
DARRAH CARR DANCE

Saturday, November 4, 2023 at 7:30 pm
THE FISK JUBILEE SINGERS

Sunday, January 28, 2024 at 3:00 pm
SYMPHORIA!
Lawrence Loh, conductor; Rachel Barton Pine, violin

CLYNE *This Midnight Hour*
BRAHMS Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90
VIVALDI *The Four Seasons*

Sunday, March 10, 2024 at 3:00 pm
SYMPHORIA!
Lawrence Loh, conductor; Julian Schwarz, cello

TCHAIKOVSKY Variations on a Rococo Theme for Cello
and Orchestra, Op. 33
MAHLER Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor

Performed at the Smith Opera House, 82 Seneca Street, Geneva, NY

Geneva Concerts programs are made possible, in part, with funds from the Williams Family Foundation; the Wyckoff Family Foundation; Hobart and William Smith Colleges; the Ontario Arts Council; the New York State Council on the Arts Statewide Community Re-grants Program administered by Auburn Public Theater; and The Audience Building Project, a program of the Lake Placid Center for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.

The preferred lodging partner of Geneva Concerts is Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott,
Geneva/Finger Lakes.

FISK JUBILEE SINGERS

Anthony E. Williams, Interim Director

Done Made My Vow to the Lord David Huery, Baritone	arr. John W. Work, III
Steal Away	arr. Thomas Rutling
I'm A-Rollin'	arr. Thomas Rutling
Rise, Shine for Thy Light is A-comin'	arr. John W. Work, III
We Shall Walk Through the Valley	arr. Undine Smith Moore
Down By the Riverside	arr. Paul T. Kwami
Hear My Prayer	Moses Hogan
Ain'-a That Good News	arr. William Dawson

INTERMISSION

Walk Together Children	arr. Moses Hogan
In Bright Mansions	arr. Roland Carter
An' I Cry Elise Golden, Soprano	arr. Noah F. Ryder
Old Time Religion	arr. Moses Hogan
Listen to the Lambs Elise Golden, Soprano	arr. R. Nathaniel Dett
There Is a Balm in Gilead Khalil McCarthy, Tenor	arr. William L. Dawson
Sweet Home Zoe Frazier, Soprano	arr. Wendell Whalum
I Thank You Jesus	arr. Robert L. Morris

FISK JUBILEE SINGERS

SOPRANO

Hannah Daniel
Zoe Frazier
Elise Golden
Gabriyel Jackson
Daisha Venson

ALTO

Micahla Anderson
Nathalie Best
Laila Cooper
Grace Smith

TENOR

Khalil McCarthy
Imani Suitt
David Huery
Kendall Speaks

BASS

El-Naton Adah-Ogoh
Christian DaCosta

ANTHONY WILLIAMS

Anthony Williams is currently Associate Professor of Music and University Organist at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he teaches organ and courses in Music History. He has served as the Interim Director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers since the untimely death of the Singers' longtime director, Paul T. Kwami, in September 2022.

Dr. Williams began his teaching career at Fisk in the late 1980s, when he served as Director of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. From 1990 to 2005, Dr. Anthony Williams was a member of the music faculty at Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana. He returned to Fisk in the fall of 2005 as Visiting Artist in Residence following hurricane Katrina. Dr. Williams holds degrees from the University of Cincinnati, the University of Michigan, and the American Conservatory of Music. He also serves as Organist and Choir Director at First Presbyterian Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee. Dr. Williams was Service Organist for the 2018 Presbyterian Association of Musicians Worship and Music Conference held in Montreat, North Carolina. In July, 2022, he presented a workshop on the organ music of Black composers at the national convention of the American Guild of Organists in Seattle, Washington.

FISK JUBILEE SINGERS TO RETURN

by Linda Robertson for *Finger Lakes Times*, October 21, 2023,
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There has come upon us a time when we yearn for what we know not, when there are no words within us to compass the slaughter of innocents, nor any way to look away, only the knowledge that if we look away, we deny our own humanity.

We join the cloud of secular witnesses who have sought transcendence in poetry, literature, music, and the arts, those nuanced expressions of loss, longing, and love that define us as human.

Such a uniquely American art form was given to the world in 1871 by a group of Fisk College students, all of them born into slavery. They toured northern cities and performed what came to be called concert spirituals. So compelling were their performances that they were acclaimed in Europe, where they performed before crowned heads, and in northern cities, including the White House.

The Geneva YMCA scheduled a performance in the Smith Opera House in April 1895, only six months after its opening — and, evidently, the first scheduled choral performance there.

The performances by the Fisk Jubilee Singers both astounded and moved audiences to tears. The only “negro” performers American audiences typically saw on stage at that time were either white performers wearing blackface and presenting denigrating caricatures, or African Americans, also wearing blackface, and presenting similar stereotypes of their race, dressed either in rags or in outlandish costumes, and portraying themselves as lazy, ignorant, and lascivious.

The first shock of recognition white audiences experienced was seeing young, African Americans not as minstrels with blackface, but dressed in respectable 19th-century suits and dresses. The second came when they began a plantation song set in traditional Western musical harmonies, singing slowly and solemnly, their talented and well-rehearsed voices blending, weaving, and moving their audiences to tears. They expressed what the audiences did not know about themselves, a shared humanity that did not diminish the unique history of suffering and resistance that gave rise to the songs in the first place.

The fame of the Fisk Jubilee Singers was all the more remarkable because of its improbability in post-Reconstruction America. Founded in Tennessee in 1866, Fisk offered a liberal arts education to African Americans, as opposed to the vocational education offered at other colleges established for African Americans after the Civil War, such as Hampton Institute in Virginia. From the beginning, Fisk suffered from a lack of money and outright hostility from some whites, especially members of the KKK.

Fisk was nearing destitution in 1871. Its music teacher, George Leonard White, decided to take a small choir on tour. White, a white missionary born in Cadiz, N.Y., and a veteran of the Civil War, defied the opposition of many other faculty and the sponsoring agency for Fisk, the American Missionary Association. He set out to follow the old abolition trail through Ohio with nine students, performing popular European and American songs.

Sometimes, White would have his students sing traditional plantation songs after the regular performance. The Fisk students initially were reluctant to do so. It had taken White months to encourage students to sing the songs they learned from their parents because the students regarded the songs as about the past they wished to leave far behind, songs, which by the poor grammar

and simple melodic lines, signified “ignorance” when compared with the European forms they studied.

The tour was failing. Barred from decent accommodations, the students had to put up with bug- and rat-infested rooms, dine on poor food, and suffer privations in the cold weather and insults from many hostile whites. They raised little money. White decided to rely on 16-year-old Ella Sheppard to develop and transcribe the plantation songs she and her fellow students knew.

Sheppard had been purchased by her father, who had purchased his own freedom. He had taken her to Ohio, where she learned to read, write, and play the piano. While there were white musicians who later readily adapted and published these songs, their presence in the repertoire was due in no small part to Sheppard and White, who blended the songs with Euro-American elements.

These concert spirituals, as they came to be called, are an inherent part of American music history. They can be heard Nov. 4 at Smith Opera House, where the Fisk Jubilee Singers will perform on the same stage their predecessors did 128 years ago. Those unfamiliar with the strength, power, and universal solace of the Fisk Jubilee Singers will find their music an unexpected balm for the soul in these troubled times.

Linda Robertson is a retired faculty member from Hobart and William Smith Colleges, where she started the Media and Society Program. She has made several documentaries about the history of abolition in upstate New York, including Geneva.

Geneva Concerts Outreach

On Friday, October 20, as part of Geneva Concerts’ annual outreach program, a jazz sextet from Ithaca College performed assemblies at three Geneva schools: West Street, St. Francis/St. Stephens, and North Street. The combo featured two saxophones, a female vocalist, guitar, bass, and drums.

Director Mike Titlebaum explained to the young students what college is-- a place to study what you really like and what you want to pursue as a career. He then pointed out what makes jazz music unique and asked students if they could define terms like “improvising” and “the Blues.” Each tune featured improvising from different players. A “blues” tune was sung and played in the jazz style, then played in a style more like classical music, pointing out the differences. The group’s high level of musicianship, and the leader’s educational approach to the program made the performances very entertaining and effective.

Tom McClure

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