

KEY EVENTS 'N YOUR AREA

Central Arkansas & Beyond!

Christmas with the Art Porter Singers

Famed Choir Marks Return To In Person Performances



by Kelly K. Eddings

Special to Today's Communique

In 1976, renowned jazz luminary, Art Porter, Sr. assembled former Horace Mann High School choir members, their spouses, and friends at historic Bethel A. M. E. Church in Little Rock, forming the Art Porter Singers to present a program of Christmas music. Their performance of Handel's "Messiah" followed in December 1977 and continued until the onset of Covid-19. The group's forthcoming concert is its first in-person performance since then.

I caught up with the choir's director and board chair of the Art Porter Music Education organization, Sterling Ingram to learn about the choir, Sunday's performance, and plans for the future.

Handel wrote Messiah for modest vocal and instrumental forces, with optional settings for many of the individual numbers. What types of modifications, if any, have you all made since the original do you believe?

We have not altered anything. We have tried to remain true to Handel's work.

How many members of The Art Porter singers are there currently? Do you plan on increasing its size?

There are currently 40-50 members on the roll. We are always reaching out to recruit new members. We have 2 new members participating this year.

What does the creative process involve with the production of the Christmas concert?

The singers must not only know the music technically, but must also understand the message of the music.



The late Art Porter, Sr. (credit, Arkansas Black Hall of Fame)

Do any of Mr. Porter's family members participate in the production?

None of the Porter family are members of the singing group. However, they are always supportive with their attendance. Art Porter, Jr. was the last active Porter family member.



The Art Porter Singers at their 2019 holiday concert (historic Bethel A.M.E. Church Little Rock)

Is there a specific theme that the Art Porter Singers are embracing this year as compared to the past presentations?

We are not calling this a Messiah concert as in the past. We are performing selected Messiah choruses and other Christmas music and are calling it, "Christmas with the Art Porter Singers"

How are the the Art Porter Singers able to maintain their great history and prestigious tradition?

The tradition is maintained because of the individual dedication to the group.

Do singers have to audition to join the Art Porter Singers?

We do not conduct auditions. We take anyone who is willing to serve.

How many members of The Art Porter singers are there currently? Do you plan on increasing its size?

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How often do the Art Porter Singers have to practice in preparation for the big Concert?

We usually begin rehearsals in late September or early October. We meet weekly on Saturday for 2 hours. We start at noon and conclude at 2:00 p.m. This has been our schedule from the start.

Do the Singers follow a process or ritual before the performance in preparation of the Christmas concert?

No formal process. Only intense rehearsals.

How many songs will you be featuring during the concert?

We will feature about 15 selections for this concert.

How do you envision the evolution of the Concert in the next 5-10 years?

I just hope to return to pre-2019 era.

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Have the Art Porter Singers ever considered traveling to different locations for the Christmas performance?

We have not considered a different location. We would only move, if Bethel no longer wanted to host the event. Bethel is where we started and will be where we end.

Learn more about Art Porter or by visiting www.artporter.org.

Christmas with The Art Porter Singers

**Sunday, December 18, 2022
5:00p.m.**

**Bethel A.M.E. Church
815 W. 16th Street
Little Rock, AR 72206**