NORTHWESTERN
COMMUNITY ENSEMBLE
50TH ANNIVERSARY
LEGACY OF PRAISE
Commemorating 50 years of ministering God’s praises through song to strengthen, uplift, encourage, and connect members of the community.
"IT WAS PART OF A MOVEMENT, NOT JUST A MOMENT, BUT A MOVEMENT RELATED TO THE POWER AND THE EFFICACY OF BLACK ART."

EILEEN C. CHERRY-CHANDLER
NCE CO-FOUNDER
of the Northwestern Community Ensemble: The Banner of Blackness, The Vessel of Soul, The Epitome of the Spirit

The first performance of what would later become the Northwestern Community Ensemble (NCE) occurred in the spring quarter of 1971. Fifteen Black undergraduate students at Northwestern University (NU) came together to sing as a campus benefit to raise money for the legal defense fund of fellow student Bob Scott.

In its preparation for the May program, the group held its first rehearsal on Saturday, May 8, 1971. Unable to find space on campus, NU sophomores Leneda Shirley Davis and Earl Singleton, the late Reverend Jacob Blake to allow the students to meet at his nearby Evanston church. So at noon, in the small cramped choir room of Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, located at 1909 Emerson Street, the loose collection of its members would later become the Northwestern Community Ensemble rehearsed for three hours.

Eileen Cherry (Chandler) was a NU sophomore who had a gift for spotting talented students and encouraging them to get involved outside of the classroom. She spotted an out-going, colorful, and spirited student and provided some music for the Bob Scott benefit. Virtually no campus piano was safe from Leneda Shirley Davis. He was known in the Northwestern Apartments for his impromptu gospel music sessions. The vibe Davis created by his four-range, gravelly voice and his pounding yet classic gospel piano style immediately caught the attention of study-weary Black students returning home to the Northwestern Apartments for his impromptu gospel music sessions. The vibe Davis created by his four-range, gravelly voice and his pounding yet classic gospel piano style immediately caught the attention of study-weary Black students returning home.

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Apart from being an idea whose time had culturally come instantaneously into the minds of three socially conscious Black college students. So the idea to create NCE was not hatched in isolation. In fact, it was an idea whose time had culturally come instantaneously into the minds of three socially conscious Black college students. In the early 1970s, Evanston was home to Northwestern University, Kendall College, National College of Education (now National Louis University), Garrett Theological Seminary (later consolidated into Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary), and St. Ambrose Western Theological Seminary. These institutions operated under separate names and within their own boundaries — but not their Black students. Handfuls of Black students at these predominantly white schools overlooked the institutional names and street locations and sought each other out. So by New Student Week in the fall of 1971, Diana, Cherry, and Gerring had a sizable Black community to craft a choir from. An audition idea was set. Word went out that this new Black choir would consider any Black student for membership as long as they were enrolled at a neighboring school. The name Northwestern Community Ensemble not only fit the mood of the times but also expressed the intent of the group to help fill a spiritual void in the Evanston Black college experience.


This phrase, which was often uttered in prayer by the Northwestern Community Ensemble’s first chaplain, Wallace E. Gray Sr., became the ensemble’s motto.
On May 8, 2021, our campus will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the founding of Northwestern Community Ensemble. The campus choir, founded in 1971 by Eileen Cherry-Chandler, L. Stanley Davis, and Clifton Gerring III, was born out of the realization that Northwestern University and the surrounding community would benefit from, and value, Black sacred music. A half-century later, the NCE continues to minister gospel, anthems, and spirituals to the North Shore and beyond.

The Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion honors NCE’s students, alumni, choir directors, musicians, community members, and all others who have worked so diligently to bring hope and harmony to our lives through the institutionalization of an organization that is unique and vital to the Northwestern University experience. We acknowledge the need and impact of the voices of NCE and the ways in which song has touched hearts and minds in such a resounding way.

The Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion thanks each of you for contributing your time, talents, and spiritual energy to the Evanston community. We are happy supporters of the NCE and we are grateful to be included in this important commemoration. We look forward to witnessing your impact for many years to come.

In solidarity and peace,

Robin R. Means Coleman
Vice President & Associate Provost of Diversity and Inclusion
Ida B. Wells and Ferdinand Barnett Professor of Communication Studies

Foreword

“A HALF-CENTURY LATER, the NCE continues to minister gospel, anthems, and spirituals to the North Shore and beyond.”
Dear Northwestern Community Ensemble Alumni,

It is with great pleasure that I send my warmest congratulations on your 50th anniversary. The Northwestern Community Ensemble embodies the guiding principles of our work in the Office of Neighborhood and Community Relations: community engagement, social justice, and racial equity.

Fifty years ago, Ebenezer AME welcomed members of the unofficial Black choir of Northwestern when other choral groups would not. The Black community of Evanston provided students the physical space to make their voices heard. Relationships such as this foster a community that transcends campus borders. In the origins of NCE, love between students and the Evanston community enabled a group to continue to give joy and somber beauty to all who listen for half a century. NCE has built upon their origin story and continues to connect Northwestern to the greater community through the power of music and faith. NCE strengthens the fabric of Evanston with their public performances on campus and performances in local churches.

It is my privilege to support the work and mission of NCE, and I see the choir as a partner in uniting our town and gown. In times like these, spiritual healing, community, and joy are more important than ever before. We cannot wait to listen to the NCE as they sing out in praise and honor the gospel tradition in person. In that time, we will feel the power of their harmonies shine light into darkness and connect individual listeners into one community. On behalf of my office and the Northwestern community, I offer my sincere congratulations and best wishes for your continued success.

Dave Davis
Executive Director, Neighborhood and Community Relations
Northwestern University

The Multicultural Student Affairs staff extend our congratulations to the Northwestern Community Ensemble on behalf of your 50th Anniversary! Since 1971, the Northwestern Community Ensemble has uplifted the community through song and spirit by building strength, purpose, and inspiration. We are honored to be a part of your support system and appreciate the many ways you have enhanced Northwestern. We are truly a better and more grounded community because of you!

We wish Northwestern Community Ensemble many more years of praise, worship, and success!

Multicultural Student Affairs
Northwestern University
On behalf of the Northwestern University Black Alumni Association (NUBAA) and the entire NU community, congratulations on your 50th anniversary. You have remained a source of pride for the Evanston community and a spiritual refuge for our students since your inception in 1971. You are not only cherished by our students but have also become a much sought-after outlet for those in the surrounding Evanston community.

As we end this tumultuous year and look for joyful ways to feed our spirit, this celebration of your anniversary emerges and provides us with ample reason to rejoice. Since your debut concert at Alice Millar Chapel in 1971, you have provided 50 years of joyful music for generations of alumni and students as well as the community. We look forward to your heart-lifting performances for generations to come. Although we cannot celebrate in person this year, we honor you for providing a unique space to our students where they can celebrate a shared experience and the beautiful music which so profoundly affects our lives on and off campus. We look forward to celebrating the 60th anniversary with the gathering of voices and the magic you bring.

Again, congratulations and thank you!

MaryAnn Marsh
President, NUBAA
(Weinberg ’85)
Dear Reader,

It is truly an honor to be a part of Northwestern Community Ensemble’s 2020-2021 choir. This is an interesting time to be a choir, a time that challenges the resolve we have to serve God and remain connected as a community. In a year when we celebrate the historic legacy of this organization, we are motivated to reflect on what it really means to be a member of NCE, and how we can embody those values during a time when the particular avenues that we are used to using are no longer available.

I believe that from what we have already seen thus far from our choir, we are an incredibly resilient group of people that seek to do the work of the Lord, whether we are meeting in the basement of Alice Millar or scattered across the country. This choir has a passion for being in community and to unite towards a common goal, that one would think that a pandemic would at least stifle or hinder in some way. It didn’t; and this year is a testament to the traditions, the love and the support that is ingrained in the DNA of this choir from one generation to the next. As president of this incredible choir, I’ve been truly blessed to serve alongside each member, and I am so grateful for all of the work that each member has put into making this year so special. Our theme for the fall was “Finding Peace During the Storm,” and this NCE family has been able to bring glory to God in the face of so many logistical challenges that have made it difficult to weather these difficult times. I have been pushed to be a better communicator and to trust in the capabilities of my team, a lesson that all believers would benefit from mastering.

NCE has meant so much to so many different people, with ties that we have seen showcased on a national scale with the outcry of support for Mr. Jacob Blake, who had to suffer as another example of the immense discrimination in the criminal justice system. We are a community that stands up for our family, and the support that alums of this choir give to its current members does not go unnoticed, and we thank you for that. As we celebrate the triumphs of the past and look forward to the future of NCE, we appreciate being a chapter in this story of God’s goodness to those who worship Him. Here’s to another 50.

Best,

Cleon Beckford
President, Northwestern Community Ensemble
(EdSP ‘21)

“WE ARE A COMMUNITY THAT STANDS UP FOR OUR FAMILY and the support that alums of this choir give to its current members does not go unnoticed, and we thank you for that.”
“MY FAVORITE MEMORY OF NCE WILL ALWAYS BE AFFIRMATIONS. EVERYBODY WOULD WRITE THEIR NAME ON A PIECE OF PAPER AND WE WOULD PUT ALL THE PAPERS TOGETHER AND RANDOMLY PICK NAMES, AND THE SAME NAME YOU PICK WOULD BE IN SOME SONG OR AFFIRMATION.”
Claudia Kalisa

“NCE IS INTEGRAL FOR PROVIDING A SPACE FOR BLACK STUDENTS AT NORTHWESTERN. IT GENERATES A SENSE OF BELONGING, A SENSE OF BEING A PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER THAN THEMSELVES WITH PEOPLE WHO LOOK LIKE THEM.”
Diego Pinto

“MY FAVORITE NCE MEMORY IS PERFORMING ON STAGE WITH FRED HAMMOND. THE SPIRIT WAS IN THE MUSIC AND I’VE NEVER FELT ENERGY LIKE THAT IN MY LIFE.”
Jonathan Perry

MEMBERS
Claudia Kalisa
Class of 2021
E.D. Tadese
Class of 2023
Cleon Beckford
Class of 2021
Peace Mutwiri
Class of 2021
Esther Ubadigbo
Class of 2024
Sannah Boyd
Class of 2021

“STOMP,” BY GOD’S PROPERTY, KIRK FRANKLIN, AND CHERYL JAMES MAKES ME WANT TO DANCE AND STOMP! MAKES ME CLAP MY HANDS, IT MAKES ME WANT TO STOMP.
Sean Dukes
Class of 2024
Emamoke Oshobe
Class of 2021
Janelle Yanez
Class of 2021
Prophecy Aggare
Class of 2021
Jonathan Perry
Class of 2021
Emanuella Evans
Class of 2021
Sarah Davis
Class of 2022
Jules Wesson
Class of 2023
Lorren Nemorin
Class of 2022
Shalom Alarape
Class of 2022
Diego Pinto
PhD Student, Music Education
Symone Jackson
Class of 2021
Over the years, the choir has hosted annual concerts with guest recording artists, including The Thompson Community Singers, Myrna Summers, The Barrett Sisters, Andre Crouch, Sarah Jordan Powell, Kirk Franklin, Fred Hammond, Tye Tribbett, and Byron Cage. These concerts invited people from Chicago and Evanston to campus.

Through the years, the ensemble created posters for auditions, concerts, and fundraisers. The Soul Feast began as a fundraiser to finance NCE's first spring break tour. They hosted it in the Walnut Room basement of Ebenezer AME Church.
Alice Millar Chapel, circa 1970

The 1970s
“IT WAS ABOUT THE LYRICS. IF IT DID NOT BLESS FOLK, OR IF IT DIDN’T SUPPORT PEOPLE, OR LIFT THEM UP, LIFT THEIR HEADS UP, ENCOURAGE THEM, WE WEREN’T DOING IT.”

L. STANLEY DAVIS

THE 1970s
In those days like now
When the world belonged to the young
She set out in a crowd — young, Black, gifted
She who was poem, story, dance, song,
Carrying dreams in her arms
And music in her billowing Afro bush
Exuberant like promises in the air.
She took her song and passed it on —
Do you hear it? A bell rung
Calling us in.
And they sang with her
Say it loud.
I’m Black and I’m proud.
Voices rising up in a soul-rebellion,
A sweet uprising,
Taking the air, rung by rung.

Angela Jackson, Weinberg ’77
Poet Laureate, Illinois

Angela Jackson is an award-winning poet,
novelist, and playwright who has published
three chapbooks and four volumes of poetry.
Born in Greenville, Mississippi and raised
on Chicago’s Southside, she was educated
at Northwestern University and the University
of Chicago. Jackson was an early supporter of NCE and is a long-
time friend of Eileen C. Cherry-Chandler.

She led us up
Rung by rung following a strength
Through a legacy
Rung by rung
These voices young
With old songs redeemed,
Resound.
And they keep singing
A ladder of voices
Passing through time
Rung by rung
Year by year
Lifting us high into clouds
Wild and future-wise,
Free,
This glorious song, this song.
Along with his roommate Clifton Gerring, Stan Davis and I discussed our vision of how we wanted NCE to be. We wanted it to be an ensemble of singers, a tight group. We wanted to have a repertoire that would be a broad representation of the black music experience. Not just contemporary gospel, but hymn tunes and a cappella Negro spirituals and anthems that were common in the Black church. We wanted to open the door to those kids that were attending National College of Education. We went out in Evanston and found a home. The Reverend Jacob Blake at Ebenezer AME and that congregation opened their doors to us. The congregants helped us on many occasions, helped us raise money so that we could go on our first tour. And of course, Jacob Blake was involved in civil rights, and had a wonderful wife Pat Blake, who sort of took the role of mother of the choir. It was part of a movement, not just a moment, but a movement related to the power and the efficacy of Black art.

Eileen C. Cherry-Chandler, NCE co-founder (Communication ’73, Communication ’97)

The Bob Scott Affair

“Longing for a movement, for a place where my ideas can make meaning,” Bob Scott wrote to his mother in 1969. His search led him to National College of Education, where he met “for the very first time, Lois Blackmore did the lead and we didn’t start singing the song until we got to the halfway point. Because she was the lead vocalist, her role was to go to the microphone when she got to the front. But this girl had such a powerful voice. She sang, “When I think about how good God’s been to me, so many doors he’s opened that I could not see. I can’t help but serve the Lord.” And then the choir sang, “I can’t help but serve the Lord.” By that time, she would have made it to the microphone. “When I think about the time I didn’t have a dime. God stepped in, he stepped in on time. I can’t help but serve the Lord.” That was the processional!”

L. Stanley Davis, NCE co-founder and first director (Weinberg ’74, Communication ’97)
A
l Bishop Greg Ingram would say, ‘Here’s a $500 check to keep you guys going.’ And they supported us financially. Just quiet, quiet support, but you knew they were there. The Black churches were coming into an awakening. These churches were founded by the Black people who were essentially the main servants to the people on the north shore. They couldn’t live in Lake Forest, so they lived in Evanston, where they created a vibrant spiritual community. And we kind of joked that when we wrote our early history of NCE, we would say, Northwestern Community Ensemble was founded December 10, 1971, and we were created to fill a spiritual void. Hey, we were college students. I know that sounds fancy, but that’s what we were seeing, that spiritual void, not only for Northwestern, but for Kendall, Evanston, and the Black seminarians. And that spiritual void is what we tried to fill.

Gertie Brogsdale (National Louis University)

“We were created to fill a spiritual void, not only for Northwestern, but for Kendall, Evanston, and the Black seminarians.”

Bob Moore, NCE president-business manager (SPS ’88, Medill ’89)

very city we went to on spring break tours welcomed us with open arms. And we couldn’t afford to stay in a hotel, so we often stayed in people’s homes. The first tour in Norfolk, we stayed at my parent’s home. We had like 12 people stay in the house. They slept on the floor, on the sofa, in a chair. But we loved it. It was a great experience. And it really helped us get through Northwestern. I don’t know if a lot of us would have made it had it not been for the fact that we had this thing called Northwestern Community Ensemble.

Bishop Perry, first NCE business manager (Communication ’74)

The routine was rigorous. We rehearsed on Saturdays off campus at Ebenezer AME Church, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., frequently missing the 6 p.m. dormitory “break” dinner cutoff time. It all depended on how much the Holy Spirit moved us to keep on singing the prayer song “Stay With God” and praying an extra prayer for anyone who needed a hand to hold or someone to talk to. We were lucky if we finished by 5:20 p.m. — enough time to straighten up the choir room and dash. Churches of all faiths in Evanston and Chicago requested our musical ministry. Once there, our routine varied little — into robes, warm up, and sing “Stay With God.”

The Northwestern Community Ensemble was founded December 10, 1971, and we were created to fill a spiritual void. Hey, we were college students. I know that sounds fancy, but that’s what we were seeing, that spiritual void, not only for Northwestern, but for Kendall, Evanston, and the Black seminarians. And that spiritual void is what we tried to fill.

Bob Moore, NCE president-business manager (SPS ’88, Medill ’89)
THE
1980s

The Ensemble of ’71 - ’72

First row: From left to right:

Susan Davis, Kerri C. Cherry, June H. Stimson, John Lee, Greendyke Prisley, Bonnie J. Peterson, Algeria Carter, Michelle Butsch, Glenn Strother (director)

Second row: From left to right:

Lani E. Borman, Sherri Benton, Betty J. Washington, Brenda Braggs, Cynthia Lowery, Diane Lachland, Kathleen Robinson, Sherry M. Boyd, Donna W. Downard

Third row: From left to right:


Audition
FOR THE
NORTHWESTERN
COMMUNITY ENSEMBLE
when: April 15
where: Parkes Hall room 223
All auditions must be presented by 7:00 pm. Bring one prepared song. An accompanist will be provided.
APPLICATIONS DUE: MARCH 29

THE 1080s

Forming, praying, and singing in the prayer circle prior to rehearsals, and whenever we prepared to minister in song, I was nicknamed “Waterfalls” because that was when the tears would begin to flow for me. It was always such a touching moment for me. The spring tours were always a special time of bonding with members of the choir. Whenever we were traveling or had a meal together as a choir, we would always sing the grace. Often we would receive accolades and applauds from those around us. The choir served as a source of inspiration while I attended college. When my course load got rigorous and stress was trying to overcome me, being a member of the choir and singing were the catalysts I used to create balance.

Jacqueline L. Jackson
(Kendall and National Louis University, ’76)
“PEOPLE LOOKED AT NORTHWESTERN LIKE AN IVY LEAGUE SCHOOL, LIKE, THERE ARE BLACK PEOPLE THERE AND THEY CAN SING GOSPEL?”

WALTER OWENS

THE 1980s

In 1980, NCE won the F.W. Woolworth Competition at the National Black College Choir Gospel Workshop in Atlanta, Georgia.

Charles Talbert, NCE president and business manager, tenor section leader.

The 1981 Spring tour! First of all, singing at churches all over Evanston and Chicago to raise money for the tour. The church members kept us fed on Sundays! (I think there were no meal contracts on Sundays back then.) During the tour, church families would open their homes to us and sometimes they were a little creative with the sleeping arrangements…

Lisa Gibson Jackson (Communication ’81)

“I felt like I had my family right on campus with me. NCE filled any void I may have had in my life at that time.”

Charles Talbert

FACSIMILE PAGE

First page: a religious WO publication, acknowledging NCE’s 10th anniversary, which they referred to as Moving Towards Our Tenth (M.T.O.T.).

RIGHT

NCE provided music at the “Ten Years After” memorial service held at Alice Millar Chapel.

“FACING PAGE

From Quaecumque, a religious life publication, acknowledging NCE’s 10th anniversary, which they referred to as Moving Towards Our Tenth (M.T.O.T.).

LEFT

In 1980, NCE won the F.W. Woolworth Competition at the National Black College Choir Gospel Workshop in Atlanta, Georgia.

My fondest memory — the year our bus broke down in transit to Atlanta for the Black Gospel College Choir Workshop (over Thanksgiving Break). We felt isolated in a known bigoted area of the country. However, we were well received, given shelter in a church and food at a local diner. NCE made my experience precious and memorable. I felt like I had my family right on campus with me. NCE filled any void I may have had in my life at that time.

Charles Talbert, NCE president and business manager, tenor section leader.

THE 1980s

10 YEARS AFTER

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Lisa Gibson Jackson (Communication ’81)
We would always go to the National Gospel College Choir Workshop in Atlanta during Thanksgiving. It was almost like spring break for gospel choirs. We were all there singing gospel music, there were guests like the Clark Sisters. It was incredible to be among other Black college choirs. And, of course, one year we won the F.W. Woolworth competition. Everybody was vying for it and we won in 1980. I think it was at Chicago State. We sang a spiritual. We did an arrangement of “Take Me Back” that I had put together. You have to understand that people looked at Northwestern like an Ivy league school, like, there are Black people there and they can sing gospel? There were all of those surprises that were really very helpful and gave us place and platform, even more so, to be unashamedly Christian and unapologetically Black.

Walter Owens, NCE director (Music ’84)

“Being in the choir brought me closer to the Lord. It helped fulfill a spiritual void that I was lacking being away from home at college.”

Cherise Hall, NCE alto section leader (’80)

The title of NCE’s 8th anniversary concert, “Eternally His,” was inspired by the title of Walter Owens’ original song by the same name. Excerpt: “Nothing can separate me—Nothing, can ever separate me from his love. I’m eternally His!”

8th ANNIVERSARY CONCERT
“ETERNALLY HIS”

PRESENTS
What I remember most about my NCE experience was the friendship, the kinship, and the spiritual boost I received during and after rehearsals. NCE was my home away from home. When I entered Northwestern in the fall of 1980, little did I know that I would gain a new family and that a few months in I would get a solo part for the Negro spiritual, “Every Time I Feel the Spirit,” for the fall quarter concert.

When I attended auditions with director and music major Walter Owens, I didn’t fully appreciate the kind of commitment I was making. Five-hour Saturday afternoon rehearsals, Sunday engagements at Chicago area churches, a trip to the National Gospel Choir College Workshop in Atlanta, and a spring break tour to the East Coast of the U.S. in a bus that broke down on the highway were experiences I fondly remember to this day.

Ava Thompson Greenwell (Medill ’84, MS Medill ’85, PhD ’14)

I needed a spiritual home on campus and I loved the spirit and camaraderie of NCE. Spring tour and all that went with traveling, eating, sleeping, singing and worshipping together. It was wonderful for my father to be able to hear and be moved by one of our tour concerts because he had not been able to travel to Northwestern to hear us. It was lovely to have a group of like-minded Christians to be around and sing with. NCE fed my soul.

Lynn David Irby (EdSP ’80, Kellogg ’82)

“It was lovely to have a group of like-minded Christians to be around and sing with.”

Lynn David Irby
“IT WAS INSPIRING TO BE SURROUNDED BY YOUNG ADULTS WHO WERE NEWLY EXPLORING, STRENGTHENING, OR HAD STRONG CONNECTIONS TO GOD.”

GAIL A. COLE-AVENT

"I cannot say enough about my undying love and gratitude for L. Stanley Davis, who was not only my professor, but also a trusted and close mentor for me and NCE.”

LYNETTE GALLOWAY

B eing a part of NCE was not only an integral part of my experience as Northwestern, but also a natural progression for me in my life. Growing up in Chicago, gospel music was in my blood from the start and part of the family business. My two favorite NCE memories were the Youth Gospel Explosion in 1997 and co-directing the choir from 1997-1998. While serving as president of the African American Music Alliance from 1996-1998, we produced three concerts (one each year), all featuring famous gospel artists. In 1997, we had the pleasure of having the incomparable Tramaine Hawkins as our headliner, backed up by NCE. Not only was it such an amazing and anointed concert, but also a once in a lifetime opportunity for the choir to sing and collaborate with such a legend in the industry.

Lynnette Galloway, NCE co-director (McCormick ’98)

Below: Program from NCE’s 1999 fall concert.

Facing page: From the 1997 “He Will Deliver” concert.

THE 1990s

Northwestern Community Ensemble presents:

Our annual fall concert Saturday, November 20, 1999 7:30 pm Alice Millar Chapel

PRAISE & WORSHIP:

Kumbaya
Poor Man Lament
Great God Almighty
Come Let Us Adore Him
Let Everything That Has Breath
Intercession: Harmony in Spirit
My Liberty
I Love the Lord
He Will Deliver
I Shall Wear a Crown
I Am God
The Storm Is Over
Call To Discipleship

ENSEMBLE PRESENTS
The African-American Music Alliance
present...

GREAT WOMEN IN GOSPEL MUSIC!!

Albertina Walker
Tramaine Hawkins
Lois Andrews

Special appearance by...
Mahogany

Along with the...
Northwestern Community Ensemble

Tickets go on sale January 26, 1999!!!

For more information, contact the Department of Music, Northwestern University, 2000 Sheridan Rd., Evanston, IL 60201-3110.

Dedicated to the life and work of historic geniuses, the late Professor Leon Forrest, former Department Chair of the African American Studies Department.
For four years straight, Saturday mornings meant one thing and one thing only: NCE choir rehearsal. Waking up early to head to Alice Millar Chapel’s basement rehearsal room was a routine that I refused to break. Despite how busy the weekdays were or despite how tired I was on Saturday mornings (I was and am still not a morning person), I would look forward to making music and being in fellowship with my friends and peers. I was a music student at NU, studying voice and opera performance. For five days a week, I was learning classical voice and theory, but I was missing being in touch with other musical genres; most significantly gospel. I’ll never forget that first time singing in an NCE concert, the fall of 2006 in the auditorium in Tech. I knew that NCE would be stuck with me until it was time for me to graduate.

As I moved up in years, my investment in NCE grew exponentially. I knew that I wanted to lead the choir. Because music is in my bones, and both my grandmother and uncle were choir directors, I knew I had to continue the legacy. When I was chosen to be a choir director, I wanted to bridge the gap between my educational music experience and my performance experience. The choir was so open to my style of conducting and welcomed with open arms the many styles of gospel and inspirational music we explored and sang. My favorite memory of NCE is my final concert with them in spring 2010. It was a culmination of four years of a deeper connection with God and with my fellow choristers. The love was so strong!

My involvement in the Northwestern Community Ensemble shaped my four years at NU more than any other extracurricular activity I had been involved with there. It created so many memories and fostered so many friendships, many of whom I am still close to this day. It made me a better musician by keeping me close to my roots. It bolstered my relationship with God.

Cameron Bernard Jones, NCE director (Music ’10)
My favorite memory of NCE was during every spring concert, when alumni of NCE would get to come back on stage with the current choir members and sing “Great God Almighty.” It just brought a real sense of community, and it kept that connection going from people who started NCE all the way to the current members. It just gave a good sense of feeling and connection between past and current members.

Geonya Nightengale
(Weinberg ’14)

"Those scriptures helped carry me through the four years, helped keep me grounded, stable."

Jeniece Fleming
(EdSP ’09)
"We were actually a ministry and a church. We ministered to ourselves, members in our group, and those we came in contact with when we did a concert.

What I enjoyed was our preparation. How we prayed together at the beginning of every performance. Just the way we prayed for one another. The way we connected with each other, and even to this day, "Have Faith in God" is one of the things that I kind of lean on when I'm going through a tough time or situation. Those lyrics, they hold fast inside of me so I'm able to maintain or get through a situation."

JACQUELINE LOTT JACKSON
We also want to remember any ACE alumni who might be missing from this list.

"THEY WERE FRIENDS OF OURS. We would sit down and talk, and we'd go out and have dinner sometimes. We lost so many of them over the years. I hope we never forget them." Warren Lawson
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Congratulations to 50 years of NCE!

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