



The Joy, *a community newsletter*

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Welcome to The Joy!

Welcome to the inaugural issue of The Joy, the Essence of Joy Alumni Singers (EOJAS) community newsletter. EOJAS (pronounced ee-OH-jus) performs sacred and secular music from the African and African-American tradition. The choir, founded in 2005, is composed of alumni of the Essence of Joy Choir (EOJ) of The Pennsylvania State University. These two choirs and Essence2, a State College-based community choir, make up the Essence Family. Dr. Anthony T. Leach, Professor of Music / Music Education and 2009-10 Laureate, directs all three choirs.

This particular newsletter is focused on EOJAS and is meant to inform the friends and family of the choir. The Joy will serve as a companion to The Essence, the EOJAS members' newsletter. This newsletter will be made publically available on our website, www.eojas.org, and via email subscription on our website. We've launched this newsletter out of a desire to better connect off stage with those we usually only see on stage. We welcome your comments on what you'd like to see included in this newsletter. In the meantime, this launch issue includes the 2009 year in review, plans for 2010, and interviews with a member of EOJAS and with a member of Essence of Joy, the current resident choir. We will also present an analysis of a piece from the EOJAS repertoire and discuss how you can help support the choir in our future activities.

EOJAS would like to dedicate this inaugural issue to the Essence of Joy resident choir. As mentioned above, the members of EOJAS share a common experience as alumni members of Essence of Joy. We are indebted to the current students for helping to continue the pipeline of talented musicians that will compose the future Alumni Singers. Please follow Essence of Joy online at www.essenceofjoy.org.

EOJAS Year in Review



2009 was another busy year for the choir. We hope you will enjoy a short summary of some of our performing engagements this year. The photo to the left is the choir performing November 22 at The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia, PA. Photo courtesy of Mark Ruszkowski. Thanks Mark!

About EOJAS

- The Essence of Joy Alumni Singers (EOJAS) perform sacred and secular music from the African and African-American tradition. The choir, founded in 2005, is composed of alumni of the Essence of Joy Choir of The Pennsylvania State University. EOJAS has performed extensively in locations such as Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Florida, Washington D.C., Belgium, Luxembourg, and France.

Performances

- **Southern FL tour– February 11-15, Naples, FL.** EOJAS began the year with a tour in sunny and beautiful Naples, FL. EOJAS enjoyed the opportunity to perform at Pine Ridge and Gulf View Middle Schools for workshops and assemblies. Our host, Marian Dolan, also organized a workshop with local community members and a Sunday afternoon concert at Naples United Church of Christ.
- **Southern VA tour – April 17-19, Norfolk, VA.** We spent a nice long weekend performing in and around Norfolk, VA. We presented concerts at the First Baptist Church of Hampton, the L. Douglas Wilder Performing Arts Center at Norfolk State University, and a Sunday church service at Bank Street Memorial Baptist Church. Our performance at Norfolk State was part of their annual event to present the music of composer Noah Ryder.
- **Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts (Arts Fest) – July 10, State College, PA.** EOJAS continued its tradition of presenting a concert the Friday of Arts Fest at State College Presbyterian Church. Essence of Joy joined us this year for a combined choir experience. Participants from a summer music teacher institute held earlier that day on campus also joined to make a mass choir.
- **PA ACDA – August 2, State College, PA.** EOJAS was pleased to perform for the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). Essence is well known to ACDA, having performed at several state and regional conferences over the past ten years. As you might expect, an audience full of choir directors can be intimidating, but we enjoyed the evening immensely. It's always our hope that choir directors will take their experience with Penn State choral music back to their respective schools.
- **Southeast PA mini-tour – November 20-22, Reading, Philadelphia, and Phoenixville, PA.** EOJAS presented a concert Friday evening at Reading High School in Reading, PA. We performed some selections along with the Reading HS choir. The HS choir had spent a day in workshops with EOJAS conductor, Dr. Anthony T. Leach. The choir then performed as part of an ACDA Urban Coalition invitational at The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia. The invitational included four other choirs from churches and schools in the Philadelphia area, including: the Celestial Choir from Bright Hope Baptist Church, the Gospel Choir of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, the Chamber Singers from Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges, and the Clayton White Singers. Saturday evening and Sunday morning included a concert and worship service, respectively, at the First Presbyterian Church of Phoenixville, PA. While this was the first performance of EOJAS at First Presbyterian, many members of the choir performed here during their time with Essence of Joy.
- **Our Gift in Song – December 13, State College, PA.** EOJAS presented a benefit concert at St. Paul's United Methodist Church in State College, PA. The 2009 Gift in Song concert was a benefit performance for Mogoshi Primary School. Seven members of the choir visited the school in 2008 and the choir has since adopted the school as a primary fundraising target. The full choir will return to Mogoshi in 2011 to visit the school as part of our tour of South Africa. The EOJAS Gift in Song concert was one of three concerts held that weekend. The

Essence Of Joy resident choir presented a concert Friday evening and Essence2, our community choir, presented a concert Saturday evening.

2009 Tour – France

- In 2009, EOJAS spent two wonderful weeks in France. This tour was organized by Brigitte Damien and her colleagues from the choir Groupe Vocal Variations, based in Metz, France. EOJAS previously traveled to Belgium and France in 2006. This 2009 tour was organized by Brigitte, who attended an EOJAS music workshop and performed with EOJAS in 2006. Brigitte began an email relationship with choir member Alana Powers (whose interview appears in this issue) and it was their dialogue and friendship that led to this wonderful tour. Our 2009 tour focused on the regions of Alsace and Lorraine and included performances and visits to Metz, Nancy, Strasbourg, Verdun, Thionville, Peltre, Fraize, Champs le Duc, and Malbrouck. Many thanks to Brigitte and her friends and family for their wonderful hospitality and organization of this tour.

Rehearsals & EOJAS Retreat

- For as much as we perform, we can always benefit from some rehearsal time. EOJAS organizes rehearsals in various locations throughout the year. In 2009, EOJAS rehearsed in January, April, June, and November. Rehearsals provide the choir with an opportunity to introduce new selections to our repertoire and further refine our existing pieces. This August we also held our second annual EOJAS retreat weekend. This retreat provided an excellent opportunity for the choir to introduce all new music and enjoy our annual barbeque at the home of choir member Linda Hoffman. The August retreat weekend also included the EOJAS annual membership meeting. As stipulated in our constitution, this meeting provides the membership with the opportunity to learn more about what the EOJAS Board is planning and provide the membership with an opportunity to present their ideas and recommendations to the EOJAS Board.

Our Mission

- The Essence of Joy Alumni Singers is a family of singers whose purpose is to learn, present, and promote African and African-American sacred and secular music in an effort to entertain, inspire, affirm and unify the worldwide community.

From EOJAS - Alana Powers



This issue we feature an interview with Ms. Alana Arbe-Blakey Powers (right in photo, along with her baby daughter, Leilani). Alana took some time from her busy schedule in Atlanta, GA, to chat with The Joy.

1. *What drew you to PSU?* My friend told me I should apply to PSU when I said I wanted a school that would give me the total college experience that was far enough away from home where I didn't have to come home if I didn't want to, but could go home every weekend should I choose to! When I actually visited I just knew it was the right place for me, for so many reasons both seen and unseen.

The Joy

- The Joy is published twice-yearly. Its mission is to inform and to entertain. Contributions are always welcome. Contributions become the property of EOJAS and may be edited for length or clarity.

2. What did you study and what have you done since graduation? I majored in Psychology and thought I would go on to get my PhD! That didn't happen! I have been working in sales every since graduation; First with Pepsi, then Hewlett-Packard and now with a company called ATI that helps nursing students pass their board exams by preparing them while they are in school. It's an awesome job and company; I cover the entire state of Georgia and North Florida and feel very fulfilled in my current career. I have moved from PSU to Harrisburg, PA to Washington, DC and now in Atlanta, GA. We are now hoping to move abroad in the next 5-6 years, so stay tuned!

3. What made you decide to audition for EOJ? Tell us about your audition and/or when you found out you were in the group. I saw what I thought was EOJ perform when I came to visit PSU and I KNEW I had to be a part of it. So I came to my audition, sang, thought it went well. The best part of the audition is I knew all of the songs Dr. Leach had me sing, as I had sung in a choir in High School that performed a lot of the same type of music. I knew I got in when I saw my name on the list on the music building and so super excited! Although on my first day of rehearsal, I walked into the room, and realized that the group I had seen was United Soul Ensemble, not Essence of Joy. Best case of mistaken identity EVER!!

4. You've performed frequently at home and on the road with Essence and with other groups. Can you share a memorable experience with our readers? You want me to share just ONE memorable experience? I think the whole France/Belgium tour in 2006 was a memorable experience. From singing to students who had no idea what we were saying, but were SO emotional affected that they cried and gave us hugs after the concert to sleeping in a dungeon aka "The Cave" and yet still managing to see the good in it. I loved every minute and would do it again in a heartbeat!

5. Many members of the choir have mentioned a favorite Dr. Leach quote and/or bit of advice. Can you share a particular anecdote? When I was a sophomore in college I was having a VERY hard time financially and I mentioned it to Dr. Leach and he gave me a card that said "someone helped me out once" with a check to cover my bills. I was, and still am, so thankful. It's was so selfless and yet so needed. I probably would have left PSU in my first semester to go back to NYC had it not been for him and my love for Essence.

6. Do you have a favorite EOJ song? I have many favorites depending on what my mood is. For Every Mountain, Elijah Rock, Battle of Jericho, anything Ori sang, and I've got a Robe. Also the 23rd Psalm!

7. I've often felt that Essence is like a family. Can you share a time when you felt the family dynamic? You know when you haven't seen your relatives for years, but when you seem them, it's as if you just saw them yesterday. That's how I feel with Essence, although sometimes we feel, to me, like a dysfunctional family! I just have unconditional love for everyone I have ever sung with either in EOJ or EOJAS and know that they will always be there for me and I for them.

8. What makes Hotlanta so hot? I do! HELLO! hahhaha..It has everything. Culture, night life, parks, family friendly, music, affordable living, and a nice mixture of the old and the new!

9. Sometimes I miss your dreads. Do you miss them too? Yes I do, especially since I have NO idea what to do with my hair now! How sad is that? Wait...don't answer that!

10. Anything else we should know about you? Besides being happily married for 3.5 years, and having a beautiful baby girl named Leilani, I would like to let everyone know that although I can barely make any concerts, I MISS everyone and the music SO much and look forward to what the future has to offer with EOJAS!! I'm excited for the March trip to St. Thomas and the chance to make music together again.

From EOJ - Maurice Blackmon

I hope you'll enjoy our interview with Maurice Blackmon, president of the EOJ Resident Choir. Maurice is also the winner of the 2009 EOJAS Scholarship. Maurice took some time from his busy schedule to chat with The Joy – thanks Maurice! You can follow Maurice and the rest of the Essence of Joy resident choir at www.essenceofjoy.org



The Big Caveat

- The views expressed in this newsletter are the views of the authors alone and not necessarily those of the Essence of Joy Alumni Singers Board, its membership, or the Pennsylvania State University Alumni Association. Please don't sue us!

1. What is your Major? When do you graduate? My major is English (Theatre minor). I will graduate in May 2010.

2. What drew you to PSU? My high school drama teacher often talked about his path - he majored in English and minored in theatre - and how it made him a more grounded person. I took his lead and here I am today! I have to be honest; I was not a fan at first. I attended Penn State Harrisburg for the first two years of my college career, an experience that made me appreciative of my current location at University Park.

3. What made you decide to audition for EOJ? Tell us about your audition and/or when you found out you were in the group. I knew nothing about EOJ before I auditioned except for what Kristin Mowery (Kmw) told me at the information table the day of my audition. I had once heard of the choir, but I had no idea what it was or what it did. I asked Kmw if it was worth my time. Her words were, "You want to be in this choir... It's definitely worth your time." When I first saw that the choir rehearsed on Sundays I was pretty sure I wouldn't audition, but in the end I decided to give it a shot. I had auditioned for Glee Club earlier that day. It went really well. My EOJ audition didn't go quite as well, so I had no idea whether I'd make it or not. My callback was the most intimidating experience of my college career. Everyone was so talented...EVERYONE. It was overwhelming. When it was my turn to stand in front of Dr. Leach with my small SATB group, I did the best I could and sat down. My initial thought was, there's no way I'm as good as any of these people, even the ones auditioning with me. However, here I am today, proud baritone and President of EOJ.

4. You've performed frequently at home and on the road. Can you share a memorable experience with our readers? Perhaps something from the recent Asia tour? Two EOJ performances stand out most to me when reflecting on this past year's concerts. The first is EOJ's performance at a church in Hartford, Connecticut. It was the first stop on our 2009 Spring Break tour. I had gone directly from Glee Club tour - which was a week long - to EOJ tour. I was tired and ready to go back to State College... That is until the audience, or congregation if you will, reacted to our first number, "Hear My Prayer." We sang "Great Camp Meeting" for the processional... The congregation couldn't control themselves. If ever there were an appropriate

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time and place for "There is No Failure," that evening and church was it! We even reprised it because the audience refused to sit and keep quiet after the initial performance of the song.

The other concert that stands out to me is EOJ's performance at a high school in Taiwan during our 2009 Pacific Rim tour. A high school choir shared the stage with us, along with another community choir. The musical gifts these choirs shared with us were truly inspirational. EOJ took the stage last, completely basking in the cheers and ovations the choirs and audience gave us. After the concert EOJ was trapped on stage. The students of the high school choir ran at us with cameras to get pictures with us and notepads to take down our information. This all went on for about 15 minutes. A group of Taiwanese students then began singing "We Are Marching In The Light Of God." The tune spread until all 70 or so of us on stage were singing and clapping together. This lasted another 10 minutes before EOJ was called to the bus waiting to escort us back to our hotel.

5. Many members of the choir have mentioned a favorite Dr. Leach quote and/or bit of advice. Can you share a particular favorite? I've never actually heard him say this, but a good friend of mine in EOJ once told me that Dr. Leach told her "There are no disposable people in my life." That is probably the most powerful thing I've ever heard. When she recited the quote to me, chills ran through me. It has stuck with me ever since.

6. Do you have a favorite EOJ song? "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" from Born to Die.

7. Why is that one of your favorites? I love the driving piano part that holds the piece together. More than anything, the lyrics take me back to a familiar place in my spiritual journey.

8. I've often felt that Essence is like a family. Can you share a time when you felt the family dynamic? It was at our end-of-the-year dinner at Dr. Leach's house when I realized how much of a family EOJ really was. I always heard people talk about it and I also felt the potential for an EOJ family. I guess it took until the end of the year, when realizing that our beloved seniors were leaving, for me to realize the family I had been a part of for so long. We gathered in TL's living room under the sound of his playing of the piano. We expressed our appreciation for one another and displayed our sentiments, things we'd only be able to do with family.

9. Aside from joining EOJAS, what are your plans after graduation? I want to do so much! I think I'll attend grad school. I want to either study theatre or more English after Penn State. I see myself opening my own theatre within the next ten years. It's a bit ambitious, but I'm convinced it'll come to fruition.

10. Anything else we should know about you? I guess you should know that I want to be one of the many EOJ success stories. =)

Behind the Music™ - Go Tell it on the Mountain

In this column, Christie McKinney, EOJAS Soprano and music educator at Good Hope Middle School in Mechanicsburg, PA, discusses a piece from the EOJAS repertoire. This issue we discuss *Go Tell it on the Mountain*.

While many of us may know *Go Tell It On The Mountain* as a traditional Christmas carol, this song has a rich educational history.

John W. Work, Jr., a professor at Fisk University and professional musician, is noted as the first arranger of *Go Tell It* in his compilation, *Folk Songs of the American Negro*. Work included his arrangement of the song in the 1907 publication, while it was known to be sung by African-American slaves since at least 1865.

John W. Work, Jr. was well known during his time at Fisk University for helping to collect, preserve and promote folk songs of the African-American tradition. He finished a second compilation specifically designed for the Fisk Jubilee Singers. These singers are responsible for bringing the choral spiritual tradition to the world, beginning tours in 1871.

This enthusiastic, celebratory hymn was named Christmas Carol of the Year in 2004 by carol expert William Studwell of Northern Illinois University. Studwell believes the piece was originally composed by Frederick J. Work, uncle of John W. Work, Jr. While we know the first publication of this work was in 1907, it did not gain popularity until it was performed regularly by the Fisk Jubilee Singers in the 1920s. Even after these performances, this carol doesn't appear in other published compilations until the 1950s.

Well over 100 years old, this carol exemplifies the uplifting, spirited characteristic of the carols of the time. We credit the Fisk Jubilee Singers with its popularity, John W. Work for its arrangement, and perhaps Frederick J. Work with original authorship, but listeners can agree that this song still carries the jubilation and excitement with which it was first sung.

*Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain,
That Jesus Christ is born.*

*While shepherds kept their
watching
Over silent flocks by night
Behold throughout the
heavens
There shone a holy light.*

Refrain

*The shepherds feared and
trembled,
When lo! above the earth,
Rang out the angels chorus
That hailed the Savior's birth.*

Refrain

*Down in a lowly manger
The humble Christ was born
And God sent us salvation
That blessed Christmas morn.*

Refrain

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EOJAS in 2010



EOJAS has some big plans for 2010. In this issue we'll focus on some of our events scheduled for the first six months of 2010. The photo to the left is the choir performing Nov. 22 at First Presbyterian Church in Phoenixville, PA. Photo courtesy of Mark Ruszkowski. Thanks Mark!

St. Thomas, USVI

- EOJAS is very excited to travel to St. Thomas in the US Virgin Islands this March 11-14. EOJAS member and former President, Tim Abraham, is organizing this tour. If you are located in the US Virgin Islands or would like to time your vacation to match our concerts, please email our VP of Business Management for additional info on our schedule: vpbm@ejas.org or see ejas.org for specific info.

Mechanicsburg, PA

- EOJAS is looking forward to a long weekend in Mechanicsburg, PA, this May 21st to 23rd. Additional information on that weekend will be publicized on our website and on our Facebook fan page. If you are located in the area and would like to assist with advertising, please email our VP of Advertising, vpampr@ejas.org. We are always looking to add to our EOJAS Advertising Street Team. These Street Teams help spread the word in the local community by distributing posters and contacting local community organizations.

Your Town?

- Would you like to host EOJAS? If you would like to host EOJAS in your area, please contact Jennifer Heller, EOJAS VP of Business Management at vpbm@ejas.org. If you are an educator and you believe EOJAS can assist with educational goals, please also contact our VP of BM, as mentioned above.

Supporting EOJAS



EOJAS would love your support. Below are some ideas on how you can support EOJAS in our mission to learn, present, and promote African and African-American sacred and secular music in an effort to entertain, inspire, affirm and unify the worldwide community.

Come See About Us

- Most EOJAS performances are open to the public. Our events are often ticketed, with tickets available for purchase at the door. Aside from subscribing to The Joy you can also check the News section on ejas.org for information about future performances.

Follow EOJAS Online

- EOJAS is online at Facebook and Twitter. You can become a Fan of EOJAS on Facebook at: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Essence-of-Joy-Alumni-Singers/12853487133>
- You can follow our Tweets at www.twitter.com/EOJAlumni

Tell Your Friends

- If you enjoyed your EOJAS performance please invite your friends and family to join you for a future performance. We'd love to hear from them too.

Support EOJAS With Your Time

- EOJAS is always eager for assistance that anyone can provide. If you have skills in a particular field that you feel could be of assistance to the choir on a pro bono bases, please email the VP of AMPR at vampr@eojas.org. If you are a lawyer who can assist with 501 (c) 3 issues, contacts, etc. we can use your help! If you are a graphic designer who can assist with marketing materials, we would like to hear from you. Do you have skills in grant writing or fundraising? We need that help too! Professional photographer or videographer with some extra film? Accountants and tax lawyers are always in need. Instrumentalists? We'd like to hear from you too. Thanks!

Support EOJAS Financially

- EOJAS is currently applying for non-profit (aka 501 (c) 3 status) status. Until that status is awarded, we are unable to provide tax benefits to any donors. EOJAS members are not compensated financially for their performances and we rely heavily on donations to grow as an organization. The choir would greatly appreciate any financial support you are able to provide. To make a donation to EOJAS, please contact our VP of Development and Fundraising at vpdf@eojas.org. Checks and money orders are gratefully accepted. Alternatively, donations via credit card or bank transfer are possible using the Paypal™ link on our website under the section named 'Support the Choir.' Please understand that until we officially receive 501 (c) 3 status, donations to the choir are NOT tax deductible.

Please look for the next issue of
The Joy in June, 2010
