

Lifting Voices in Tribute

King Memorial Concerts Collected in New CD, Book

By RICHARD HARRINGTON
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Choral Arts Society of Washington first honored the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1969, a year after his assassination, with a memorial concert that also featured several local church choirs. They sang at Shiloh Baptist, the historic activist church where King frequently preached when he was in Washington.

"We knew we had to do *something*, be out in the community on behalf of pulling people together," recalls Norman Scribner, the choral group's founder and conductor. For years thereafter the annual tributes continued and eventually became a permanent fixture, held since 1989 at the Kennedy Center.

Now comes a fitting tribute to those tributes: "Voices: Reflections on an American Icon in Words and Song," a beautifully designed book of remembrances accompanied by a CD with 17 songs from the choral society's annual concerts at the Kennedy Center. The package makes for a history lesson that's both highly readable and highly listenable.

The CD begins, as Sunday night's Kennedy Center concert will, with the stirring sentiments of "Lift Every Voice and Sing": "Lift every voice and sing / Till earth and heaven ring / ring with the harmonies of Liberty; . . . Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us, / Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us."

Performed in 1997 by the Choral Arts Society, the Eleanor Roosevelt High School Chamber and Women's Choirs and the Young Adult Fellowship Ensemble of Metropolitan Baptist Church, this particular collaboration embodied King's never-wavering belief that "with this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood."

Other selections on the CD include a powerful "Born to Die" by the Duke Ellington School of the Arts Concert Choir and the DC Youth Chorale and Alumni; a charmingly earnest "The Storm Is Passing Over" by the Chevy Chase Elementary School Chorus; "The Precious Blood of Jesus," an elegant showcase for Choral Arts soprano Rebecca King; a spirited "Rock-a-My-Soul" by the Choral Arts So-

ciety, the Martin Luther King Tribute Choir and the Suitland High School Visual and Performing Arts Choir; Arphelius Paul Gatling III's PAUL (Performing Artists Under the Lord) on a rousing "He Has the Power"; and an unaccompanied solo rarity, soprano Janice Chandler Eteme's poignant reading of the spiritual "Glory."

For each annual concert, Scribner and a series of co-music directors (this year it's choir conductor Linda Edge Gatling) create a new program that includes European classical pieces but emphasizes the African American religious music — stately anthems, haunting spirituals, vibrant gospel and communal protest songs — that underscored and empowered the civil rights movement. One of the new selections this year, Scribner notes, is the spiritual "If I Can Help Someone Along the Way, My Living Will Not Have Been in Vain." It was one of King's favorite hymns and a credo quoted frequently in his sermons and speeches.

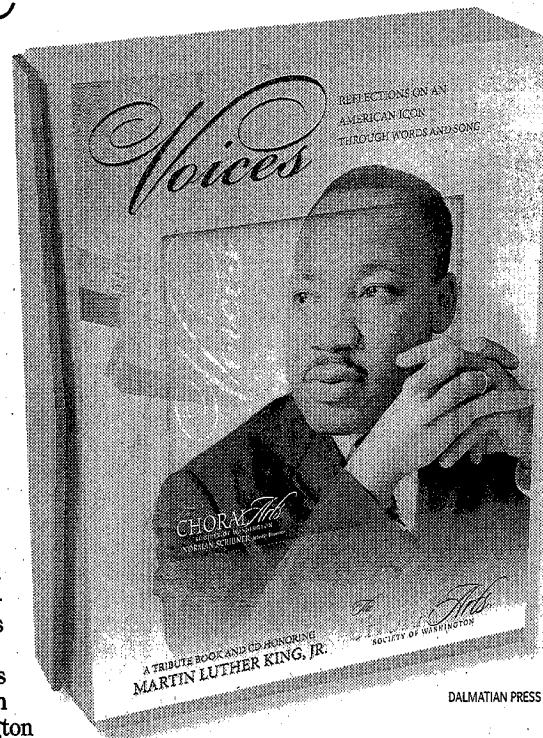
While the 190-strong Choral Arts Society is a constant, many other voices reflect the rich traditions of choral ensembles in the Washington area. This year, they are the Maryland State Boychoir and the Martin Luther King Tribute Choir, assembled from local gospel choirs by Gatling.

"How magical it is," Scribner says, "when you have basically a Caucasian choir doing concert music from Western civilization treasures and then have an African American choir singing some good gospel and spirituals, and then they come together and mesh just like cogs in a machine — black, white, black, white — and start singing anything you care to name, the 'Hallelujah Chorus' or 'Deep River.'"

"Everyone is the same and that's the metaphor, that's the message."

For many, in fact, the annual concert highlights begin after intermission, when all the choruses somehow pack themselves onto the Concert Hall stage. The circle is completed on a number of songs when the audience participates. Makes you glad the Kennedy Center roof is on tight.

The "Voices" collection ends, as the concert traditionally does, with the audience joining in on Thomas A. Dorsey's "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." It was said to be King's favorite hymn; he would invite gospel legend Mahalia Jackson to sing it at civil rights rallies to inspire the crowds. Just moments before he was killed, King had requested it be played at an event he was to attend



that April evening nearly 40 years ago in Memphis when he was shot.

The 96-page "Voices" book uses musically themed sections to contextualize key events in the history of the civil rights movement as well as King's life and legacy: "Discord" (1954-59), "Crescendo" (1960-63, building to the triumphant August 1963 March on Washington), "Harmony" (1964-67), "Elegy" (1968-69) and "Symphony of Brotherhood" (1970-present).

Brief narratives and historical photos accompany remembrances from civil rights movement icons who marched alongside King, as well as writers and politicians, ordinary people and schoolchildren. In fact, "Voices" is the centerpiece of an ambitious civil rights movement-focused, arts-integrated curriculum that the Choral Arts Society hopes to introduce nationwide for kindergarten to 12th grade. For now, the book, CD and curriculum will be provided free to all the media centers of District public, charter and independent schools.

Sunday evening's 20th Annual Choral Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is sold out. Call 202-244-3669 to join the wait-list for tickets, which are \$20.

A choral tribute to Dr. King

Civil rights activist Julian Bond honored at annual event

By Emily Cary
Special to The Examiner

Julian Bond has devoted his life to emulating Martin Luther King Jr.'s example of nonviolent struggle to achieve civil rights. In recognition of his many contributions to society, the 2008 Humanitarian Award will be presented to him during the Choral Arts Society's Annual tribute to King on Sunday.

"I'm one of the very rare persons who attended one class Dr. King taught in 1960 at Morehouse College in Atlanta, where I was a student," Bond says. "It was a survey course in philosophy, and I was one of only six people in attendance. He was famous then, but not nearly so

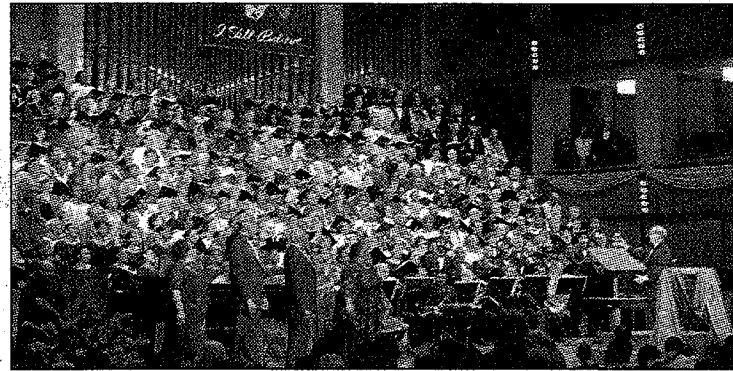
famous as he was going to be. "At that time, many people knew that he was a tremendous critic of war, all war. He believed strongly in an interracial movement involving all races, not just black and white, and he emphasized that promoting nonviolence, racial equality and peace is something everyone can become involved in without special training."



Bond

The MLK choral tribute was first performed 20 years ago by the CAS under the artistic direction of Norman Scribner. It has grown in scope to embrace musicians from throughout the area in a spectacular multicultural production.

Broadway star Ben Vereen hosts the program of gospel and classical favorites performed by the CAS, the Maryland State Boychoir and



The Choral Arts Society performs its annual tribute to Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday.

the 2008 Martin Luther King Tribute Choir. The massed choir from churches in the Greater Washington metro area is conducted by Linda Edge Gatling, who serves with Scribner as co-music director of the event. Throughout the concert, the audience will view projections of images from "Voices: Reflections on an

American Icon Through Words and Song." The new book and CD set celebrate the life and legacy of King and the concert's 20th anniversary with music from past years.

As a civil rights activist, Bond has faced jail for his convictions, was a founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and has served as chairman of the Board of the NAACP since 1998. At the 1968 Democratic Convention, he was nominated for vice president, but had to decline because he was too young. In 2002, he received the National Freedom Award in honor of his many contributions to society.

A writer and commentator, he narrated the Academy Award-winning "A Time for Justice," the celebrated series "Eyes on the Prize" and numerous documentaries. Today he serves on several boards, holds 25 honorary degrees and is a distinguished professor at American University and professor of history at the University of Virginia.

"Of all the things I've done, teaching gives me the greatest satisfaction," he says. "I tell my students that, although Dr. King was the primary figure of the civil rights movement, he was not the only one. Hundreds of thousands of people, most of them anonymous, contributed and the young people I'm teaching have the opportunity, as well, to play a vital role."

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If you go

- » **When:** 7 p.m. Sunday
- » **Where:** Kennedy Center
- » **Tickets:** \$20
- » **More info:** 202-467-4600 or www.kennedy-center.org

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New Teacher's Guide

The Choral Arts Society of Washington is pleased to debut its new **90 page** publication, *Voices: A Teacher's Guide*

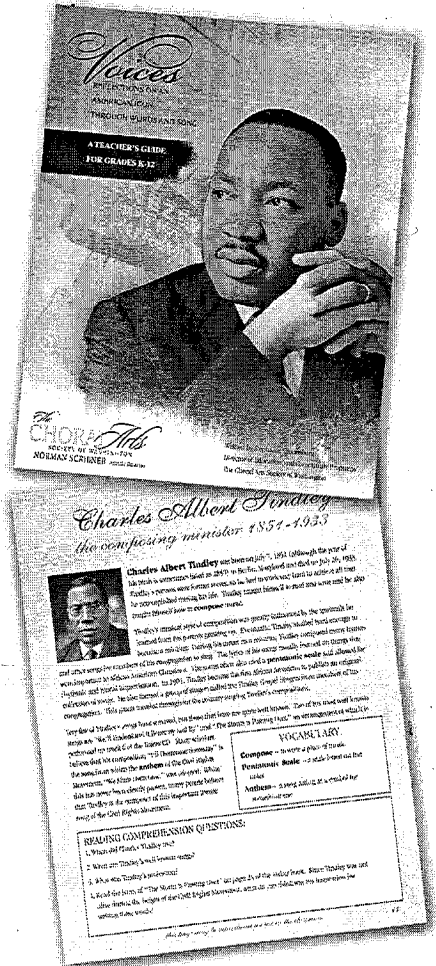
- Companion to the Dalmatian Press publication *Voices: Reflections on An American Icon through Words and Song*
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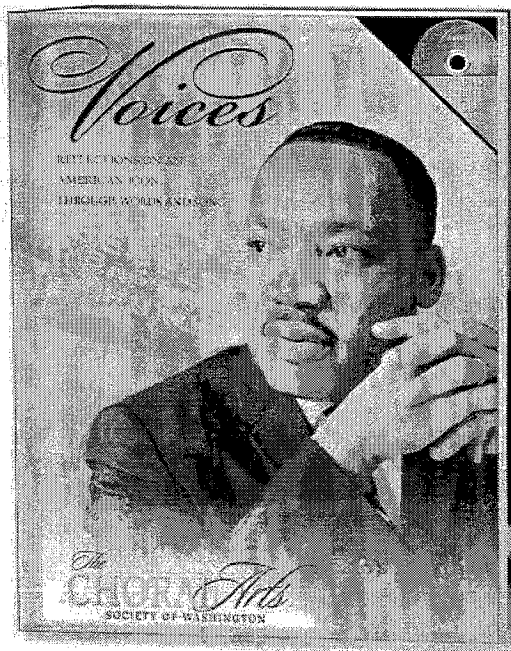
EXPERIENCE

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Choral Arts is pleased to announce that

**Norman Scribner and
Linda Edge Gatling and
Special Guest Julian Bond**



will autograph books and CDs in the Grand Foyer
outside the Concert Hall immediately
following the performance on January 13, 2008.

Books and CDs are available for purchase from Theater Concessions.

The Kennedy Center

