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## Spirituals Project works to preserve 'gift to the musical world'

By COLLEEN LONG  
Associated Press

*Last Updated: Oct. 17, 2001*

**Denver** - Charmaine Anderson stepped to the microphone, beads of sweat gathering on her face as her powerful voice filled the hotel ballroom.

"I wanna be ready," she crooned as the [Spirituals Project](#) choir hummed softly in the background. "I wanna be ready to put on my long white robe."

At a recent convention of the National Association of Negro Musicians, the soprano's rendition of "I Wanna Be Ready" silenced the rustling papers and few whispers from the audience of about 300.

The song, a newer arrangement of a traditional spiritual, is a sad, slow hymn about preparing for judgment day. People swayed, clapped and occasionally wept while the choir performed spirituals and recited poetry.

"I feel so free singing. It's funny because these songs came from the slaves," she said.

The Spirituals Project was formed in Denver about three years ago by author and psychology professor Arthur Jones to educate the public about spirituals, what he calls the original American music.

He and his piano accompanist, Ingrid Thompson, have traveled the country conducting lectures and workshops on spirituals since 1991. Their programs combine performance of spirituals with presentations on the songs' historical significance and how they relate to modern music.

For Jones, a 5-year-old professor at University of Denver, music has always been a passion. He's been performing most of his life, but until he wrote "Wade in the Water," a book about the history of spirituals, he didn't think to create a group devoted to performing them.

"It started as just an outside interest, but evolved into my life's work," said Jones. "I discovered while doing the presentations something permanent needed to be established."

A small ensemble from the choir is currently performing in a play about youth gang violence called "Not Here." The full choir plans to sing before a special performance of the play to show support for the victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"We were working on the play before the attacks," Jones said. "But now, it seems so much more relevant. How can we expect our kids to reject violence when they see adults acting so horribly violent?"

The spiritual style of music has roots in Africa, as folk songs sung during work, worship and entertainment. During slavery, spirituals evolved into songs expressing deeply held religious convictions, especially for converted Christians.

The songs also reflected longings for freedom, often hidden within song lyrics. In "Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel," for example, the singer asks the angel "...to blow me home / To my new Jerusalem."

"In times of crisis, people want to reach for something with a deep meaning," Jones said. "These songs were created in a time of great crisis, and I think when something comes out of crisis it comes from a very deep place in the human spirit. It ends up with a universal appeal."

James Kinchen, music professor at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, said groups that work to preserve the spirituals are a necessity.

"The spiritual was this country's unique gift to the musical world. They should be cherished, remembered and taught," he said. "If we teach them with understanding, that these are more than just words and notes, it helps everyone see their social and historical importance."

Jones' choir was formed soon after the project was founded. The 70 members are a multiracial mix of professional musicians, students and amateurs. Members are unpaid, and perform mostly in Denver, but will travel to Greeley and Colorado Springs in the next few months. Jones also hopes to travel throughout the United States.

"Many people that sing in the choir aren't Christian, but the message of the music is larger than a religious denomination. It really brings people together," Jones said.

The nonprofit project is also producing a documentary about the songs for PBS, and is working with the University of Denver to create a Web site.

When Jones founded the Spirituals Project, he was happy to discover others shared his interest, although the spirituals preservation movement is still relatively small; he said only about 20 choirs nationwide perform the music on a regular basis.

But interest is growing. Groups like the Brazeal Dennard Chorale in Detroit and the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble in New York City are professional choirs, and many community groups throughout the country are starting to perform the music.

"We may have different ways of going about it, but we are all fighting for the same thing, and we use each other as strength and also as resources," Jones said.

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## BELIEF & PRACTICE: African-American Spirituals August 26, 2005 Episode no. 852

**BOB ABERNETHY**, anchor: Spirituals are the folk music first sung by Africans brought to this country as slaves. Arthur Jones is a psychologist at the University of Denver. This summer he was in Washington speaking to the Faith and Politics Institute and also, as part of a Smithsonian Institution program, visiting a Boys and Girls Club, where he taught spirituals to children who may never have heard them. Dr. Jones' book, like the spiritual, is called WADE IN THE WATER.

Dr. **ARTHUR JONES** (Psychologist, University of Denver and Founder, The Spirituals Project): Spirituals are basically the earliest form of black sacred music, and these spirituals were created by African Americans who were in slavery.

(Speaking to Young Children): The ancestors passed these songs to us. These are songs that are gifts to us today. So even though these songs were created 150 years ago, we can still use them today.



Even before large numbers of slaves converted to Christianity, they brought with them from Africa some very, very long-standing religious traditions, sacred traditions that highlighted the importance of storytelling. So even if you weren't a Christian, you could really get a lot out of a story about a guy named Moses. So you grab that story and you use it as a basis for a song, and then you have a spiritual.



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Probably any spiritual you could take and kind of mine it for the different meanings, but "Wade in the Water" is especially rich. You can talk about the fact that Harriet Tubman used the song to encourage people to wade in the water as they were escaping from slavery, to throw the bloodhounds off their scent. You can talk about it as a baptismal song. So you wade in the water -- baptism by immersion. And then you have this symbolism of the waters as, basically, the spiritual force that everybody has within them so that you're wading in the waters of your spirit.

Kids really relate to music. Blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, hip-hop, gospel music -- all of those forms of music are built on the foundations of the spirituals. Just like the spirituals spoke to the slaves, rap music speaks to kids today, and we need to honor that and use that as a vehicle for teaching them about the spirituals because, in many ways, the connections are very similar. And if you teach them some of these songs, it becomes a part of what they hum and they sing.



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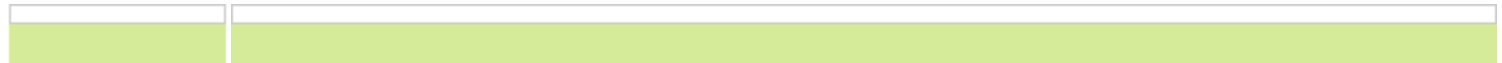
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Tuesday, September 19, 2006

## Get the message with spirituals

"Over my head, I hear music in the air!" These words of hope from an old negro spiritual announce The Denver Spirituals Project Choir, directed by Iowa Mennonite School alumnus Arlen Hershberger, coming to the area. The choir is a 65-member ensemble whose mission is to share the spirituals in a way that audiences will not forget. The multi-cultural and inter-generational choir will appear for the inaugural musical event of IMS's new Celebration Hall, a 600-seat venue on the school's campus southwest of Iowa City.



In addition to the 7:30 p.m. Saturday concert at IMS, the choir will appear for the 10:30 a.m. worship service at historic First United Methodist Church in Iowa City.

For Hershberger, there is special significance to this venue, as it is where he first heard the spirituals in a 1950 performance by the legendary black choir, Wings Over Jordan.

The Spirituals Project, a secular, community organization housed at the University of Denver, has ties to this community that were unknown to the founders when it all began.

A meeting over coffee with Arthur Jones and Hershberger in November of 1997 revealed more than a mutual interest in preserving and revitalizing the songs created by enslaved Africans in America.

It just happened that both were students at the University of Iowa at the same time in the late '60s, Jones in psychology and Hershberger in music. Hershberger was born and raised in the rural Wellman/Kalona Mennonite community, while Jones came from New York City.

Those apparent differences, notwithstanding, mutual and overlapping sensitivities set off the spark that has become The Spirituals Project.

## Calendar

- The Denver Spirituals Project Choir, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Iowa Mennonite School, 1421 540th St. S.W., Kalona, 683-2586; and 10:30 a.m. Sunday, First United Methodist Church, corner of Dubuque and Jefferson streets, Iowa City, 337-2857.

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Jones, a professor at the University of Denver, earned his masters and doctoral degrees in clinical psychology at the University of Iowa. Although he had sung these songs as a youth, it was during one of his spirituals recitals that an overpowering ancestral connection reshaped his future and set him on the course of sharing this music with the world. Hershberger credits his childhood experience in a close Mennonite community with his strong orientation to the spirituals as a way to "transform individuals and communities" as stated in The Spirituals Project's mission statement.

The arrival of The Spirituals Project Choir to this area will be a cultural exchange for visitors and hosts. Choir members will stay with Kalona/Wellman area families and will be treated to a meal in a Beachy Amish home. Hershberger is committed to making the short stay in the area memorable for everyone.

Tickets to the Saturday concert can be purchased by calling Iowa Mennonite School at 683-2586 or 656-2073. From Iowa City, take Highway 1 about 13 miles south to the Cheese Factory and turn right. IMS is 4.5 miles west, a half mile past the stop sign. If you plan to attend the Sunday service at First United Methodist, on the corner of Dubuque and Jefferson, allow time for parking and please be seated by 10:25.

Spirituals are simple songs but powerful. "The more I learn about the spirituals," says Hershberger, "the more these songs mean to me. The music comes from a very deep place within the human spirit and carries with it a message of healing and hope to all people."

*Jean Eckstein's son, John, a UI graduate and a Denver attorney, sings bass in the Spirituals Project Choir. Arlen Hershberger contributed to the writing of this column.*

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## LEGIT

Posted: Fri., Nov. 10, 2006, 6:11pm PT

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Regional

### The Spirit of Frederick Douglass (Newman Center, University Of Denver; 971 Seats; \$25 Top)

By BOB BOWS

A Shadow Theater Company and the Spirituals Project presentation of a play in one act by Larry Bograd. Directed by Jeffrey Nickelson. Musical direction, Arlen J. Hershberger.

Middle-aged Douglass - Jeffrey Nickelson  
Elder Douglass - Hugo Jon Sayles

If ever America needed a statesman to rekindle the flame of liberty at home and abroad, now is the time. The appearance of Frederick Douglass onstage to remind us of the intent of all those fine words in the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment couldn't be more welcome. To have Larry Bograd's epistolary encapsulation of Douglass' life accompanied by a host of magnificent spirituals and archival images from the Library of Congress transforms the great man's story into the live equivalent of a Ken Burns documentary.

Tracing Douglass' journey from slave to fugitive to free man, playwright Bograd mines the writings and speeches of the subject -- whose eloquence eclipses his equally illustrious contemporary, Abraham Lincoln -- from his early 20s to his death at 77 in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 20, 1895.

As the middle-aged Douglass, Jeffrey Nickelson -- artistic director of Shadow Theater Company, Denver's professional black acting troupe -- captures the fiery passion and philosophical brilliance of our country's foremost advocate for equal rights for all persons, regardless of color, sex, education and financial status.

Looking every inch the young "Lion of Anacostia" (the mature Douglass' D.C. neighborhood), Nickelson finds the intrinsic cadence of the noted orator's rhythmic line, manifesting the full power of Douglass' classic rhetorical persuasion.

Early on, Douglass explains the perfect logic for spirituals accompanying his words: "Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. ... I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness."

In collaboration with Shadow, the Spirituals Project selected nine arrangements from its repertoire, including "God Save the Queen"/"My Country 'Tis of Thee," "John Brown's Body"/"The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "Go Down, Moses" and "Amazing Grace," as well as new number "We Look Like Men of War," to fulfill the musical directions in Bograd's script. Whether accompanying the 130-plus slides, providing subtext to Douglass' words or filling a dark hall, the 75-voice, multiethnic choir delivers a nuanced and inspirational performance.

Mixed in with the younger Douglass' urgent observations are the wizened subtleties of the Sage of Anacostia. Across the stage from Nickelson's characterization, Hugo Jon Sayles imbues the gray-mantled version with the gravity of a tested and still-robust freedom fighter passing the torch to the children of his success.

While the timeline of the narrative slides -- which are interspersed among stunning historic images -- occasionally hiccoughs, and the detail in the projected text is occasionally wanting, we are in no way distracted from our hero's message.

Set, Michael Duran; multimedia, Brian Freeland; sound, Hershberger. Opened, reviewed Nov. 3, 2006, Running time: 1 HOUR, 15 MIN.



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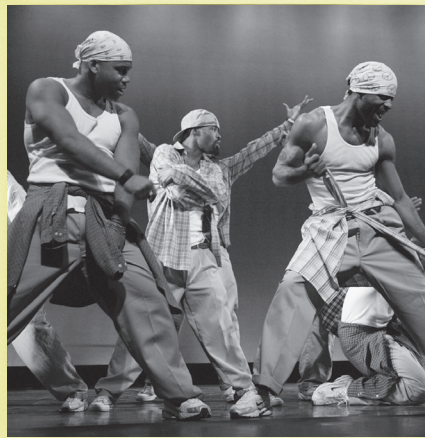
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By **STEPHANIE SIMON**

DENVER -- Eighth-grader Tre Hunter scrunched down in his chair and explained why he didn't expect much from the coming concert of old Negro spirituals.

He prefers hip-hop, he said with a grin. "It's more inappropriate. But it has the beat."

Then the lights dimmed and, as the first choral notes floated up, a slide show began: images from a slave ship and a slave auction; drawings of children bending to pick cotton, bending to be whipped. Tre, 14 years old, straightened up.

The concert was put on by The Spirituals Project, a nonprofit that aims to nurture African-American students by connecting them to their past.

With the nation's first black president preparing to move into the White House, many young African-Americans are looking ahead. The Spirituals Project, like other leadership programs, offers words of caution: Slow down. Look back.



**'I Can Tell the World'**  
2:38



The Spirituals Project, a Denver-based nonprofit, aims to nurture African-American students by connecting them with the rhythms of their pasts, as shown in this segment from the documentary "I Can Tell the World." (Dec. 4)

As a generation of young black leaders, who didn't necessarily participate in the civil-rights struggles, emerge on the political stage, older mentors hesitate to sound like they are dwelling on the brutal legacy of centuries past. Yet they say young African-Americans can't appreciate the significance of Barack Obama's election or prepare to reach for bigger milestones without a thorough grounding in their history.

Students today must "study the lessons learned from the past and know the pain that comes with sacrifice," said Arlivia Gamble, chairman of the National African-American Women's Leadership Institute in Dallas. "I learn more about my own story from hearing the stories of others, and these songs are the stories of peoples' lives," Ms. Gamble said.

The Spirituals Project is led by Arthur Jones, a psychologist at the University of Denver. For more than a decade, Dr. Jones has traveled Colorado and the nation to talk about spirituals, often joined by a 75-member multiracial choir.

This work has coincided with a renaissance

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The Spirituals Project

The 75-member multiracial, multigenerational choir from The Spirituals Project sings slave-day standards for a contemporary audience.

of interest in the old music. A Negro Spiritual Scholarship Foundation offers college money to the best young soloists. New books, music anthologies and documentaries have spurred interest in the haunting melodies and subversive lyrics -- many of them coded digs at white masters or guides to fleeing north, to freedom.

"When I grew up, many people would not sing these songs because it was reminiscent of slavery and it was shameful," said Maurice Jackson, a historian at Georgetown University. "This generation can look at

these songs with pride."

But as Mr. Obama prepares to take office, Dr. Jones wonders whether these songs of oppression and resistance will still resonate.

"There's a risk, absolutely, particularly now," Dr. Jones said, "that people will say, 'What does this old stuff have to do with anything?' "

His answer: a lot. He thinks spirituals can inspire the black community of today much as they kept hope alive in 19th-century slaves. "These people didn't have any reason to be hopeful, to think they could change anything, yet they did," he said. "That needs to be a model for us today...when we have all these problems like gang violence and unwed pregnancies."

He would like students today to see Mr. Obama's victory not as a culmination but as one more step in a centuries-long march toward justice, equality and fulfillment. "This is not the end of the story," he said.

The recent concert for 600 students across metro Denver spanned the centuries, from soulful, age-old spirituals to the rowdy showmanship of a "hip-hop violinist" who layered a modern urban beat atop traditional songs such as "The Battle of Jericho." The concert also showcased civil-rights activist Bernice Johnson Reagon, who sang a spiritual that sustained her when she was jailed after a freedom march in the 1960s.

Such work is vital to helping students put Mr. Obama's victory in context -- and locate their own lives squarely within the tradition of black struggle and success, said Roland Carter, a board member of the National Association for the Study and Performance of African-American Music.

"I'm afraid people will get too comfortable after the election," Mr. Carter said. The old songs, he said, offer a constant reminder of the need to reach for something better, to "rise above whatever situation you find yourself in."

But captivating students with lyrics like "all God's children got shoes" may be easier said than done.

After startling to attention at the slide show and listening intently to the first few songs, Tre Hunter slumped again, looking drowsy. As he filed out, he gave a wan thumbs-up -- but didn't seem too taken.

Neither did 11-year-old Jordan Moreland. "It's old," she said. "It's slow."

"A little boring," agreed Kiahjura Womersley, 10.

But their friend Christina Alexander, 13, was deeply moved. As she listened to the voices blending in harmony, she said she kept recalling the brutal images that opened the concert. "To think," she said, "that our ancestors were singing."

Write to Stephanie Simon at [stephanie.simon@wsj.com](mailto:stephanie.simon@wsj.com)

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New on DVD» The Coens’ Oscar-nominated “A Serious Man” »14D

LIFESTYLE

New discs: Sade and Allison Moorer »14D

This is W. Bruce Cameron’s brain on Level 3 »14D

Television by Joanne Ostrow

# Spirituals journey led to PBS

Ken Burns gave us 19 hours on jazz. Martin Scorsese oversaw 14 hours on the blues. There have been umpteen films about the history of gospel music, R&B and its crossover to pop, and numerous recent documentaries about rap and hip-hop.

But until now there hasn’t been a major film dedicated to the first purely original American music, spirituals.

The Spirituals Project, a local institution based at the University of Denver since 1991, was the starting point for a film that explores the history of spirituals and the lasting cultural significance of the sacred songs of the slaves.

“Without the spirituals, there would be no gospel, blues, jazz, R&B, hip-hop or rap,” according to Denver filmmakers Larry Bograd and Coleen Hubbard, a husband-and-wife writing-producing team.

Their film, “I Can Tell the World,” premieres on Rocky Mountain PBS at 9 p.m. Thursday on KRMA-Channel 6.

The documentary grew out of a collaboration between the Spirituals Project founder Art Jones and Denver’s Shadow Theatre Company, which had presented the Project’s multiracial, multiethnic choir performing a play Bograd wrote, “Spirit of Frederick Douglass.” The work combined readings, speeches and music and was directed by the late Jeffrey Nickelson at DU’s Gates Concert Hall.

After the performance, Bograd won a commitment from an anonymous benefactor to fund a documentary.

The notion of a film for PBS was a dream Jones had nurtured for years.

As a psychologist, an African-American, a historian “and just being a citizen,” Jones said, “all the parts of me came together” in the desire to spend more time learning about the spirituals.

After much fundraising and nibbles from PBS producers, Jones encountered “one roadblock after another.” The project stalled in 1996.

Now, with Bograd, Hubbard and their unnamed angel, the dream was

OSTROW » 14D



Coleen Hubbard and Larry Bograd filmed “I Can Tell the World.”

Cyrus McCrimmon, The Denver Post

## The \$25 Haiku

Rich LaCrue of Morrison, winner of The Denver Post’s \$25 Haiku contest this week, wrote this on the topic of “heart:”

Red, soft, tender, warm  
beating fast upon your touch  
my symbol of love

Read more haiku at denverpost.com/haiku. You also can go to denverpost.com/lifestyles to have The Haiku Guy, our avatar of verse, read aloud. If you’ve got something to say in a 5-7-5 poetry form, enter a one- stanza haiku at lifestyle@denverpost.com or file it at denverpost.com/haiku. Don’t forget to include your name and hometown. Our favorite wins a \$25 gift certificate to the Tattered Cover Book Store.

This week’s topic is: **Mardi Gras.**

The deadline is midnight Thursday. Good luck, and start writing.

## Summer Camps 2010: The List

# Calling all campers



Happy campers at the YMCA’s Camp Chief Ouray near Granby, with director Marty Ferguson.

## Five program veterans on the outdoors’ enduring allure

By Maria Cote Special to The Denver Post

It might have been a wonderful experience at age 10, hiking or acting or painting and, most important, bonding with a handful of great friends. Or perhaps it was a memorable moment swimming, splashing and laughing with buddies when life’s future seemed as brilliant as the sky overhead.

For some camp directors, childhood experiences at summer camp affected them so deeply they moved into the field, often from counselor up the ranks to director. For others, the fact they weren’t able to attend camp was a strong incentive to reach out to kids. We spoke with the directors of five summer camp programs to find out what inspired them to a job that requires long hours, a ton of patience and a whole lot of love.

**Marty Ferguson,**  
Camp Chief Ouray director

Camp Chief Ouray, part of the YMCA of the Rockies, is Colorado’s oldest camp, having celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2008. And Ferguson, who has been a director at the camp near Granby for more than six years, is proud to be one of many of the threads woven into the blanket that brings warmth and joy to so many kids.

“I didn’t go to camp as a kid,” says Ferguson, 38. “I started as a counselor at a camp in Michigan, and I fell in love with it. It’s a calling. When I see the awe and wonder of learning these kids have, I wish I had that opportunity, no matter how great my childhood was.”

The camp offers everything from arts and crafts to swimming to horseback riding. And a lot of the counselors know the camp well.

“Our campers range in age from 7 to 17,” he says. “As they get older, they progress and can learn to become counselors. Last summer, we had five counselors who had been in the same cabin when they were 10 years old.”

**Lisa Townsend,**  
Adams Camp program director

When she graduated from college, Townsend knew she wanted to be a teacher. She quickly discovered how to put her talents to good use. “I started as a music therapist,” says



Fishing for fun at Gates Camp.  
Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Denver

## Day Camps

**Adams Mystery Playhouse**

Call about interactive mystery theater camps where participants solve a crime by studying relationships and puzzle deduction. “Mystery of the Stolen Gem” for ages 5-9, “Murder in the Haunted Mansion” for ages 10-14. Shows are approximately two hours. Sack lunches welcome, drinks provided. \$12-\$18. 2406 Federal Blvd., 303-455-1848

**Adams State Volleyball Camps**

Camps for hitters, setters and defensive specialists, June 5; individual skills camp for grades 6-12, July 5-7; team camp, July 8-10, \$250 per team entry fee (guarantee of 11 matches, both varsity and subvarsity divisions, two-night stay). Dorm and meal plan offered, local motels also offer team discounts. Alamosa, adamsstatevolleyballcamps.com, ascgrizzlies.com

**Adoptive Families Camp**

Aug. 7-8: Colorado Heritage Camps present a weekend for children adopted domestically and their entire family. Age-appropriate workshops and activities for kids ages 3-18. Also workshops for parents. \$95-\$125 per family member. Lodging fees separate, if applicable. Scholarships available. 303-320-4234, e-mail: hcamps@comcast.net, heritagecamps.org

**Adventure Quest Day Camps**

June-August: Active outdoor Renaissance-themed games, solving riddles, brainstorming creative solutions, dueling with foam swords. Ages 6-16. Denver/Boulder. 303-786-9216, renaissanceadventures.com

DAY CAMPS » 4D

## Overnight camps » 6D



Adams Camp program director Lisa Townsend and a little camper.

Townsend, 30. “It sounds hokey, but I feel blessed. I call this ‘heart work.’” Adams Camp welcomes kids with special needs, like cerebral palsy, autism, Down syndrome and other diagnoses that cause developmental delays. They also help the families of these kids.

“There are two programs: therapy camps, which are family-centered, and our adventure programs, which are sleep-away camps.”

During the therapy camps, therapists from all fields, from speech to music, work intensively with the special-needs child.

“What’s nice is that it’s a respite for the family,” Townsend says. “Siblings

CAMPS » 4D



NewOnDVD



Michael Stuhlbarg and Fred Melamed in Joel and Ethan Coen's "A Serious Man." *Focus Features*

"A Serious Man"

★★★☆☆ Joel and Ethan Coen's quietly amusing, philosophical rich tale about a beset family man is set in a Minnesota suburb 1967, a time when the Coens themselves were coming of age outside Minneapolis. Michael Stuhlbarg is Larry Gopnick. The physics professor isn't Job. These days it doesn't take as much to send a man of faith reeling. But he does embark on a journey to understand God's will leads him to three rabbis and one divorce lawyer. The ensemble is pitch perfect, especially Richard Kind as Larry's beleaguered brother and Fred Melamed as his wife's lover.

R. 1 hour, 45 minutes. *Lisa Kennedy*

"Couples Retreat"

★★★☆☆ Four couples land on an island that doesn't indulge their fantasies but challenges them to work on their relationships. Perhaps that sounds unfunny. But in the midst of marriage fatigue, stars Vince Vaughn and Jon Favreau (co-writers, along with Dana Fox) find plenty of comedy, some of it buoyant, some of it unexpectedly insightful. Jason Bateman, Faizon Love, Kristen Bell, Kristin Davis and Malin Akerman round out the pairs. Jean Reno plays New Age-y relationship guru Marcel. PG-13. 1 hour, 53 minutes. *Lisa Kennedy*

"The Time Traveler's Wife"

★★★☆☆ Rachel McAdams and Eric Bana play their roles straight and seriously, have a pleasant chemistry, and sort of involved me in spite of myself. They're just so ... nice. He's a time traveler and disappears when you and he least expect it. You have to suspend belief over a lot of the details but all in all it's a sweet movie. PG-13. 1 hour, 47 minutes. *Roger Ebert*

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onvideo.org

NewCDsInReview



Sade, "Soldier of Love" (Sony)

It's been a decade since the last full-length Sade album, a long wait for fans of those lush rhythms and melancholy vocals that come together to create the signature sound of the singer born Helen Folasade Adu 51 years ago. And to be honest, not all that much has changed.

To be sure, the 10 new cuts here, each a welcome addition to the catalog, show off an older and wiser artist. The voice is deeper and the lyrics richer. But Sade seems mostly unaffected by the things that have gone on in music since her debut 25 years ago. For example, the song "The Moon and the Sky," with its regretful refrain and jaunty guitar strumming, would be right at home on 1985's "Promise."

There are a few welcome surprises. "In Another Time" is the sort of soulful '70s ballad that Sade has avoided. It leaves the lilt behind and lets



Allison Moorer wrote her latest record, "Crows," on the piano instead of guitar. *Jim Cooper, Associated Press file photo*

the singer have her gentle rant. The last 45 seconds of "Soldier of Love" feature an unexpected remix/dub combo that give a gimmicky single some depth. And it's hard not to love the way "Babyfather," a sentimental track about parenting, evolves into a catchy layered groove at its close.

With its patient bounce and supple phrasing, Sade's music remains as smooth and jazzy as ever, and yet still the opposite of the "smooth jazz" genre it helped propagate. The arrangements are complicated, while the album's themes — about love, yes, but

also regret, loneliness and missed opportunity — are often painfully raw. Anyone who thinks this is easy listening isn't really listening to it.

*Ray Mark Rinaldi*

Allison Moorer, "Crows" (Ryko)

Neo-country artist Allison Moorer wrote her latest (and seventh) record, "Crows," on the piano instead of guitar. She wrote songs like "Easy in the Summertime" and the title track on piano because it was the first instrument she learned, and it was only fitting because these songs are "the soundtrack to my childhood,"

Moorer has said.

Moorer's scarring childhood has been well-documented, but these songs tell the sweet side of her relationships with older sister (and country star) Shelby Lynne and her mom, who was shot and killed by her husband in 1986. (After killing his wife, Moorer's estranged father then turned the gun on himself.) But this record doesn't sound like a silver lining. It comes off like a revelation.

"Should I Be Concerned" sounds like an elegant Rufus Wainwright song. "The Broken Girl" is sunny pop at its best. "Just Another Fool" and "Like the Rain" bring a little guitar into the mix, and what an even mix it is.

Moorer, now a New York girl enjoying her marriage to folk rebel Steve Earle, will appear Wednesday on "Late Show With David Letterman."

*Ricardo Baca*

Steal This Track»

This week's new free download on Reverb: "Whipped," by Orange peel moses

»denverpost.com/reverb

OSTROW: Tracing power, meaning of songs

◀◀ FROM 1D

alive again.

As a kid singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" and "Go Down, Moses" at summer camp in Colorado, Bograd thought those were Jewish songs. Similarly, young people today assume songs like "We Shall Overcome" are references to the civil rights era. Taking on the film project, Bograd and Hubbard began to explore the real history of the songs of pain and hope.

The effort was interrupted by Bograd's open-heart surgery in January 2006.

"It's sort of a running joke that I'm not the most spiritual person in the world," he said. "But after that experience, I was a lot less sardonic than I might have been."

Bograd, a learning consultant, and Hubbard, a teacher-writer, began following the choir in spring 2007, tracing the hidden meanings as well as the redemptive power in the music of the slaves, using Jones' 1993 book, "Wade in the

Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals," as a reference.

Hubbard shaped the story, finding a narrative in the tales of several choir members, why they joined and what the music meant to them. Those interviews provided the structure to talk about the transformative power of the music.

"Art always made it abundantly clear that the music is universal," Hubbard said, "that everybody, no matter what race or background, has had a time of turmoil where that music can heal."

The film was finished in May 2008 and screened at the Rhode Island Film Festival. Everything about the work was "serendipitous," Jones said.

At a convention of African-American professional musicians in Chattanooga, Tenn., Bograd had the experience of being the only white person in the room, showing the movie to 300 black people.

"We had a certain amount of trepidation about being white filmmakers ... but by the end of the screening they all

were crying. That to me, that was the sign that we had transcended race enough to make a movie that was honest."

**KCNC morning team.** Alan Gionet will be sprung from weekends to weekday mornings when KCNC-Channel 4 debuts a new morning team in March. Anchors Brooke Wagner and Gionet will be joined by meteorologist Jennifer Zepelin and traffic reporter Lynn Carey.

**Super ratings.** Sunday's Super Bowl telecast on CBS was the most-watched program in U.S. television history, according to the Nielsen Co. More than 106 million viewers watched the New Orleans Saints beat the Indianapolis Colts, surpassing the audience of 105.97 million for the 1983 finale of "M\*A\*S\*H," Nielsen said.

Joanne Ostrow: 303-954-1830 or jostrow@denverpost.com

Humor by W. Bruce Cameron

Finally, a study that explains my basement

I was fascinated to listen to a report on how to make one's brain more effective, although my brain wasn't all that interested.

There are three levels of brain activity. Level 1 is the lowest level — the amount of concentration required to, say, delete e-mails or serve in Congress. We spend a lot of time in Level 1, including all of our teen years.

Level 2 is mild engagement, like listening to an in-law. Our brains are burning glucose and becoming fatigued (or, depending on the in-law, enraged). You want to limit Level 2 activity so as not to become so tired that you slip back into Level 1, so if your mother-in-law calls, hang up.

Level 3 activity requires all of your brain and creative power — like when you make up an excuse to your spouse for why you hung up on her mom. The brain can process only about two continuous hours of Level 3, which means that just as an airplane is on final approach, the pilot is thinking like a teenage driver.

For most people, the most productive brain time is in the morning, when people are rested, fresh and preoccupied with deleting e-mails. Throw in a little conversation to burn off any Level 2 you've got left, and voila — an entire office of Level 1 thinkers.

This has enormous implications for the workplace. Let's say Worker A and Worker B are employed by a large corporation. Worker A starts every day in his cubicle,

tackling intense tasks while his brain is at Level 3. Worker B, however, spends the morning chatting with co-workers about fantasy football and sticking his head in the boss's office to discuss "American Idol."

When it comes time to lay off employees, the ax will fall, of course, on Worker A — people don't like him; the guy never comes out of his cube. Worker B will be promoted until he's running the place and makes the company so inefficient and bloated that it requires billions in government bailout money, resulting in huge executive bonuses. See how it all comes together?

Studies show that individuals who check e-mail and text messages frequently suffer the same loss of IQ as do people who smoke a great deal of pot. This, more than the recession, explains why so many young people are moving back to their parents' basements. It's disturbing, because all the people in their 20s who are still smoking pot and living in parents' basements are now having to share space with people who spend all day on Twitter.

So parents are hearing arguments like this:

Son: Mom! Susie is texting and won't put her phone on mute, and I'm trying to watch "America's Top Model"!

Susie: Well, he smells like burned jungle fungus!

Parents: Why don't you two focus your Level 3 brainpower on productive

activities?

Susie: What'd she say?

Son: Huh?

Susie: Ummmmm ... What?

Son: Uh ...

So now you need more space, but as any contractor will tell you, the hardest room in the house to expand is the basement. This forces parents to do the next best thing, which is to sell their home and move someplace where they don't have basements. This floods the market with houses, causing the banks to take on enormous losses, requiring gigantic government bailouts and huge executive bonuses. The executives e-mail each other with bonus congratulations and they read those e-mails in the morning, which starts the cycle all over again. Thus is born the digital economy.

I've decided that the best way for me to counter this effect is to focus on my most intense work at 4 in the morning — in other words, when I'm still asleep. That way I'll have gotten all my Level 3 activity out of the way by the time I start smoking my e-mails. Within a few years, I'll be so efficient no one will want to hire me, and I'll have to move in with my parents.

They have a big basement for just that purpose.

Contact W. Bruce Cameron at wbrucecameron.com. For his previous columns, visit denverpost.com/brucecameron.

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# The Songs—And The MultiRacial Choir—Shaping Racial Reconciliation

August 26, 2008 12:00 PM | [No Comments](#)

For Claurice McCoy, singing at the Democratic National Convention as the party is about to nominate its first Black Presidential candidate is an indescribable experience.

“I am 74 years old,” she said, “I was born in the South and I can remember back in the day with the colored fountains and the white fountains and you had to stand and sit at the back of the bus. I didn’t think I would ever live to see this day.”

McCoy is one of the founding members of The Spirituals Project Choir, a multiracial, multigenerational choir based in Denver that performs and preserves the melodies and lyrics created by slaves of African descent during the 18th and 19th centuries. McCoy has been a member since the choir’s founding in 1999. Her daughter and granddaughter also sing with the choir, which has 75 members.

In addition to the choir, The Spirituals Project runs a larger program of community education and programming to bring the benefits of the spirituals to contemporary communities. Founder Arthur Jones started recruiting people to help bring the spirituals to new life in 1991.

“The choir is an ambassador for the mission of the project,” said Jones. “The mission was to educate people about the way in which coming together to sing the songs that enslaved Africans created has the potential not only for personal healing but also for racial reconciliation.”

Jones says its not just the act of singing together, but something about the songs themselves, which were created in a time of such trauma and oppression, and yet are still hopeful and forward looking. In addition to singing together, the choir, and the larger project, provide venues in which people can talk about the racial conflicts in their communities and begin the process of transforming themselves and their neighborhoods.

Focusing on the hard work of reconciliation isn’t always easy, according to Jones.

“When people first come in, its all lovey-dovey,” he said. “People feel that just because they’re coming together in an interracial setting. We have to raise awareness that we’re bringing all of our racial baggage into that situation even when we’re singing.”

Making room for Black members to experience the music differently from others, for example, can be challenging, and there was a time in the early days when it seemed possible that the choir would be all white, rather than fully multiracial as it is today.

The team sang in two venues during the convention. First, they opened Sunday’s religious service with a 15-minute concert, which was interrupted by three white men who had choreographed an anti-abortion protest. Each stood at various times during the performance to shout slogans about Obama supporting abortion. The choir paused, the crowd shouted “Yes, we can!” and Obama’s name, and security quickly escorted the men out.

The second performance took place outdoors as part of the Dialog: City project. It was a collaboration with the installation artist Ann Hamilton and the composer John Kuzuma, involving 3 additional choirs from across Denver. The theme was Circles of O, and the performance featured singers waving O signs in the breeze. The spirituals included “The Welcome Table” and “Down by the Riverside.”

Members do have their favorite songs.

McCoy loves the song “O Freedom” whose words stand out bold and strong: “Before I’ll be a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave.”

Kaati Ross, 23, loves “Hear My Prayer,” which asks God to give grace and Christine Chao was especially struck by the line “We ain’t gonna study war no more.”

“We’re making war, not only in Iraq, but also on our own citizens here,” she said. “That’s what the African American ancestors told us. We have to study... we have to think about it, not just say, ‘We’re going to defeat somebody’.”

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*Rinku Sen is the author of The Accidental American, which hits bookstores on Sept. 11.*

oldcl\_Pullquote1:For more information on The Spirituals Project, including the upcoming documentary film *I Can Tell the World*, go [spiritualsproject.org](http://spiritualsproject.org).\*\*oldcl\_Image:spirituals black woman.jpg\*\*oldcl\_PhotoCredit:ColorLinesmagazine

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# Dream

Photo: Cathy Busha

## Martin Luther King, Jr. 80th Birthday Concert

acclaimed mezzo-soprano

Denyce Graves

with

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Friday  
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7:00 pm

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Opera House

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Denver Performing Arts Complex

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Parterre - \$75      Loge & Balcony - \$15



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# Park Hill Elementary's auction schooled in rock

**Chuck and Becky Morris** have been helping out at Denver Public Schools' Park Hill Elementary for a long time. They've had three kids there over 11 years (**Sophie, Isabel and Zach**) — and music promoter Chuck and his energetic wife are always bringing star power to the school's annual auction.

Becky Morris started it eight years ago — giving her a mission to pry tickets from Chuck and guitars from musicians backstage.

This year, the auction comes down Feb. 7 at Park Hill Golf Club. She scored a signed guitar from **Neil Diamond** and a Big Head Todd package that includes tickets to any show the boys do this summer, anywhere in America, along with a meet and greet and a bunch of band swag.

Over the years, Becky's favorite hits include a drumhead signed by



**BILL HUSTED**  
*Denver Post Columnist*

**Ringo Starr**, an album signed by all of the Rolling Stones, a Rolling Stone magazine with **Dave Matthews** on the cover signed by Matthews, a poster signed by **Bob Dylan**, the "Circle" albums signed by the guys in the Nit-ty Gritty Dirt Band and a guitar signed by the Eagles. "And I think I got something from U2," she adds.

Now she's done.  
"The auction will always go on," Becky says. "But this is my last year."

**I've got a crush on you.** The Broncos have a new coach — and an old soda. It could be a good omen.

Orange Crush, the pop that was identified with the Broncos defense from 1977 to 1979, is back in town. The refreshing gulp was yanked from Denver shelves in 1987. No one can tell me why, especially when it was selling 2 million cases a year here. Do you think Denverites drank all that Orange Crush or just turned the cans into leis around their necks? Some say it was the Orange Crush that made the Broncos and Denver famous. Now it's back — and it goes well with vodka.

**SWI.** The Aspen Daily News reports that a man was busted last week for snowboarding while intoxicated. Seems he couldn't wait for an après-ski party to start imbibing — and riding a gondola or lift while boozed-up is a violation of the Colorado Skier Safety Act. He was issued a

summons, and a cop drove him home.

**Speak up!** Sluggish ticket sales forced the new Insight Speaker Series to close down — its last four yakkers canceled (**Charles Barkley, Bob Woodward, Carole Baldwin and Dave Barry**). Subscribers will get tickets to the six speakers in the upcoming Unique Lives & Experiences series.

Town Hall is probably Denver's oldest speaker series, founded by the late Polly Grimes in 1954. **Gary Pudney** is due here Jan. 29. He's won more than 50 Emmys as veep of ABC for more than 20 years — and has stories to tell about nine presidents, the White House, the Oval Office and Camp David. Call 303-698-0230.

**City spirit.** Arf! The hot new club in town is Sid's Doggie

Lounge & Nightclub. ... **Peter and Patty Findlay's** cool retro Aspen pad was featured in The New York Times on Friday. ... Sez who: "Don't you wish you had a job like mine? All you have to do is think up a certain number of words! Plus, you can repeat words! And they don't even have to be true!" — **Dave Barry**

*Bill Husted's column appears Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. You can reach him at 303-820-1486 or [bhusted@denverpost.com](mailto:bhusted@denverpost.com). Take a peek at Husted's next column at [blogs.denverpost.com/husted](http://blogs.denverpost.com/husted).*



**Chuck, left, and Becky Morris** have a history of helping the school.

## REVIEW

# Musical tribute rises to heights of honoree

**By Sabine Kortals**  
*Special to The Denver Post*

It was an event fit for a king. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., that is.

Part of a four-day, citywide commemoration of the civil rights leader, Friday night's gala at the Ellie Caulkins Opera House celebrated the 80th anniversary of King's birth. With opera diva Denyce Graves as headliner and The Spirituals Project Choir at the core of the program, the "Dream" concert inspired a tapestry of whimsy, soulfulness, sacred reflection and joy.

Graves' stately, stunning presence, mellifluous mezzo-soprano and easy rapport with the audience lent an air of grace to the occasion. In H. Leslie Adams' "Prayer," she captured its gently nuanced, contemplative mood, and in Gene Scheer's "American Anthem," her strong, focused delivery brought home a spirit of patriotic pride.

But it was Graves' sultry rendering of the "Habanera" aria from Georges Bizet's opera "Carmen" — which she performed more than three years ago at the Ellie's opening — that was most memorable among her solo selections. J.J. Penna also earned high marks as Graves' wonderfully intuitive accompanist — not only is he an accomplished, perceptive pianist in his own right, but he anticipated each gradient of Graves' tone, her every subtle change in breath and intensity.

Graves then joined the mighty choir — about 70 volunteers — in a polished progression of spirituals and similar songs, such as "Steal Away" to "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit."

The program opened with John Hubert directing the decade-old, nationally known choir, followed by Bennie Williams in firm command of a

range of selections from among the group's lexicon of songs. "Walk Together Children," "I Know I've Been Changed" and "I Can Tell the World" combined to represent African tribalism, America's history of slavery and a victorious attitude of freedom.

Especially brilliant was the choir's riveting take on "The Battle of Jericho." The overall intimate sensibility of the program, however, might have been even better served if the choir had stood closer to the edge of the stage.

Bertha Lynn, KMGH-Channel 7 news anchor, kicked off the evening, which included a recorded excerpt from King's "The Drum Major Instinct."

The city's tribute events culminate in Monday's annual marade (march and parade). For more information, visit [drmartinlkingjrhc.org](http://drmartinlkingjrhc.org).

# PREPARING TO SET SAIL FOR GARDEN SHOW



Cari Schweitzer of LaFond FX, a special-effects company in Commerce City, works on the masthead of a pirate ship display that the company is building for this year's 50th annual Colorado Garden & Home Show, which runs Feb. 7-15 at the Colorado Convention Center in Denver.

*Craig F. Walker, The Denver Post*



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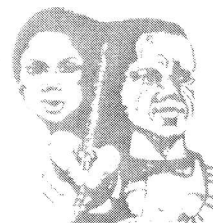


# The National Association of Negro Musicians, Inc.

*An Historic Organization – Since 1919*

Office: 11551 South Laflin Street – Chicago, Illinois 60643

Telephone (773) 568-3818 Fax: 773 785-5388



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March 30, 2010

Dr. Arthur C. Jones  
1395 Dahlia St.  
Denver, CO 80220

Dear Dr. Jones:

Greetings on behalf of The National Association of Negro Musicians, Inc.! I am pleased to officially invite you to be one of our 2010 honorees at our Awards Banquet taking place during the 2010 Annual Convention on July 27, 2010 at the Antler's Hilton Hotel in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Our convention committee has recommended you highly for your contributions to music in general, to the viability of music in your community and to the support and development of African American music. You are know world-wide for your work in the preservation of the African American Spiritual and we are pleased to honor you!

We hope you will accept our invitation to be honored, attend our banquet and receive your award from us in July. To that end and for our souvenir journal will you please send your biographical sketch and a high resolution photograph? It would be helpful if you as soon as possible could send those items electronically to our Executive Secretary, Ms. Ona B. Campbell at ONAB9120@aol.com. Otherwise, please use the address above. We may need to edit the biographical information to fit the space in the journal and it will be helpful for you to let us know what information we may delete, if necessary. We also invite you to invite your family and friends to attend our Awards Banquet. We will cover the cost of your ticket for banquet; however your guests may purchase tickets for \$60.

Thank you for all you do for music. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions at 404-614-3783 or dmorrow@morehouse.edu. I look forward to seeing you and to honoring you in July.

Sincerely,

David Morrow  
President, The National Association of Negro Musicians, Inc.

# Spotlight On: The Spirituals Project

NICOLE FREHSEE



Amani Ali’s career keeps him so busy that he starts his day at 2:30 am. “I wear a lot of hats,” says Ali, who spends his afternoons at radio station 850 KOA, where he’s head producer of the drive-time show The Ride Home. Ali’s mornings are devoted to The Spirituals Project, a Denver-based organization dedicated to preserving the music and teachings of spirituals — the folk songs sung by enslaved African Americans in the 18th and 19th centuries. “People dismiss spirituals as religious songs,” says Ali, the project’s executive director. “But they’re a real art form — they were used by slaves to communicate through the Underground Railroad.”

The project started in 1991, when University of Denver professor Dr. Arthur Jones launched a series of metro-area concerts and lecture programs centered around the spirituals. Seven years later — after a local TV station filmed a documentary about Jones’ work — the project became official. Last September, Ali joined the team to oversee the nonprofit’s educational initiatives. “Even though young people learn basic U.S. history, a lot of them have never heard of the spirituals,” says Ali, who organizes presentations at middle schools in Denver, Colorado Springs, and Jefferson County. “Some adults haven’t either, which is surprising.” (Think you don’t know the spirituals? You’re probably mistaken: “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “Wade in the Water” are in the canon.)



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Aside from its educational bent, the foundation also has an artsy side: The Spirituals Project Choir, a 70-person chorus, performs these traditional folk songs. (The project also boasts two smaller ensembles.) The flagship choir — which requires an audition to join — performs everywhere from the Denver Art Museum to local churches, but the group is secular. “There are Jewish, Christian, and Muslim members, whites, blacks, and Hispanics,” says Ali. “They just want the camaraderie, and they want to sing.” One of the choir’s shining moments came in May at a sold-out University of Denver performance with Colorado hip-hop crew the Flobots. The choir sang its signature spiritual, “Oh Freedom,” to which the Flobots added a rap. “Incorporating the two art forms was so unique and interesting,” says Ali. “The crowd thought it was fantastic.”

Feeling Spiritual

September 11, The Spirituals Project will hold its inaugural Red Gala of Denver, a fundraiser Executive Director Amani Ali created to “honor the memories of those who lost their lives in pursuit of freedom and social justice,” he says. (The event’s date isn’t coincidental, says Ali; it was chosen to commemorate our 2001 national tragedy.) The gala’s keynote speaker is, appropriately, a social activist and famous singer: Harry Belafonte, who was heavily involved in the Civil Rights Movement and sang the 1956 tune “Day-O (The Banana Boat Song),” will be on hand to accept the project’s first Balm in Gilead award. (Belafonte won’t perform, however.) “I’m honored that Harry is coming,” says Ali. “He’s 83, so he doesn’t travel much anymore, but he understands our mission.”

[spiritualsproject.org](http://spiritualsproject.org)

*This article appears in the **September 2010** issue of Denver Magazine*

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