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Fisk University Singers Coming to UM for Black History Month Concert

Thursday performance at Ford Center free to the public

FEBRUARY 20, 2018 BY ANNA HERD



The Fisk Jubilee Singers perform Feb. 22 for the first time at UM for the 2018 Black History Month Concert at the Ford Center. Submitted photo

OXFORD, Miss. – The **University of Mississippi Department of Music** is bringing the world-renowned Fisk Jubilee Singers to campus this week for the university's 2018 Black History Month Concert.

The performance is set for 7:30 p.m. Thursday (Feb. 22) at the **Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts**. Admission is free and open to the public.

The concert is billed as "Be a Harmonizing Voice for Diversity" and also will feature the UM

Concert Singers in a joint performance on the closing numbers. The **Ole Miss African Drum and Dance Ensemble** will perform as stage warmers before the show. The event is coordinated by George W.K. Dor, UM professor of music and the **Sally McDonnell Barksdale** Chair of Ethnomusicology.

"We use the Black History Month Concert to promote and celebrate diversity," Dor said.

"The concert will feature two ensembles, one from a predominantly black institution and the other from a predominantly white university. The optics of symbolic interaction can send a powerful message of the determination of these two universities, taking their diversity projects to another level."

Paul Kwami, Fisk University professor and the director of the choral group, will present "The History of the Fisk Jubilee Singers," at 1 p.m. in Nutt Auditorium. This lecture is free and open to the public.

Established in 1871, the Fisk Jubilee Singers are credited for popularizing "Negro spiritual" music in the United States and Europe. In the late 19th century, the group traveled all over the Northeast and ventured to England, Germany and other European nations, performing this unique American genre to help raise funds to prevent Fisk University's closure.

By the end of the group's tours, it had raised enough money to guarantee the school's survival and build Jubilee Hall, the university's first academic building.

Fisk University, founded in 1866, is a historically black university in Nashville, Tennessee, and was a leader in ensuring education for African-Americans following the Civil War. Notable alumni include sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois, former U.S. Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary, U.S. Rep. John Lewis and acclaimed pianist Matthew Kennedy.

Karen Davidson Smith, UM clinical assistant professor of curriculum and instruction, attended Fisk University and was a member of the Jubilee Singers from 1990 to '94. The Oxford native said she is excited "beyond words" to have the celebrated choral group at **Ole Miss**.

More than 150 years after the group's founding, "the Jubilee Singers are still spreading magic through music that is both enchanting and thrilling," Davidson Smith said.

"As a graduate of an historically black college who now teaches at a predominantly white institution, I have often felt that no one here is really interested that my culture is in full existence," Davidson Smith said. "I am excited that both majority and diverse students have an opportunity to learn about the rich history of the Jubilee Singers and Fisk University."

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Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student.

“James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier,” a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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