The Harlem Spiritual Ensemble

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The University of Northern Colorado's Program Council invites you to explore the world of the Negro Spiritual with the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble Feb. 22 at the Union Colony Civic Center.

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Performance brings out roots of Negro spiritual

By BETH MAYER
Tribune Staff Writer

The American Negro Spiritual is a musical genre that is deeply rooted both in the history of music and in the history of African Americans.

With February being Black History Month, the timing seems perfect for an evening with the acclaimed Harlem Spiritual Ensemble on Feb. 22 to celebrate the art of Negro spirituals.

The internationally-known group will be performing Wednesday night at the Union Colony Civic Center.

The performance is co-sponsored by the Civic Center and the University of Northern Colorado's Program Council.

Kanika Washington, center stage chairwoman for the UNC Program Council said the evening should be a "very cultural experience," that offers a "rich portion of African-American history and music as a whole."

"It's just wonderful music," said Beth Hellwig-Olson, director of student activities at UNC, and advisor for the Program Council.

The Ensemble's performance will be part of UNC's "Art la Carte" series.

The group, comprised of eight members, was founded in 1986 by the ensemble's director Francois Clemmons and debuted at the Harlem School of the Arts.

All of the members are professional musicians, and each of them are classically trained and educated.

Tenor Clemmons has performed with the New York City Opera, the Los Angeles Civic Opera, and many other companies.

He has recorded Porgy and Bess on London records and is also the founder and director of the American Negro Spiritual Research Foundation Inc.

Other members of the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble include Janet Jordan (Soprano), Stephanie Beadle (Lyric Soprano), La Shelle Allen (Mezzo Soprano), Raymond Frith (Baritone), Richard Bellazzin (Bass), Jeffrey Marder (Pianist), and Donald Eaton (Percussion).

The Ensemble has performed not only in the United States, but internationally as well, in countries such as Germany, Austria, Italy, France and Finland. They also have toured in Japan and Korea and plan to return to the East next season.

WHERE TO GO

WHO: Harlem Spiritual Ensemble
WHAT: celebration of the Negro Spiritual
WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Feb. 22
WHERE: Union Colony Civic Center
TICKETS: Tickets are available through TicketMaster and also through the UCCC Box Office (356-5000) the day of the event. Prices range from $5.50-$9.50.

American Negro Spirituals have long been a part of this country's history.

When African slaves were shipped to the United States the songs were used as a way of communication.

The slaves rarely spoke the same African language, had different tribal affiliations and different customs. The songs gave them a way of "talking" without cultural barriers.

Later, the Negro Spirituals were used as work songs for the slaves to sing as they tended the fields. The Spirituals were influenced generations later by Christianity.

Slaves put biblical stories to music to help them endure hardships.

The songs also were used to convey hidden codes and messages that eventually helped many runaway slaves escape to the North.

A song such as "One Mo' Ribber tuh Cross" would signal escaped slaves that they had to travel farther to reach freedom.

During the Feb. 22 show, the Ensemble will be performing among other songs, "Go Down Moses," "Wade in Duh Water," and "O What a Beautiful City."

It is one goal of the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble that the Negro spirituals performed remain historically accurate in their presentation.

The spirituals will be performed as they were hundreds of years ago, without grammatical corrections of King's English pronunciations. For example, "Lord" will not be substituted for "Lawd" or the more grammatically correct "that" for "dat" because the group feels such alterations may lessen the spirituals' history and meanings.

Hellwig-Olson describes the Ensemble's performances with adjectives like "very spiritual," "moving," "enjoyable," and "educational."