American Negro Spiritual Research Foundation Inc

François Clemmons
Founder/Director

Helen Rubino
Executive Director

168 West 100th Street #5
New York, NY 10025
☎ 212-749-3657  FAX 212-932-2743
American Negro Spiritual Research Foundation

Mission Statement
The American Negro Spiritual Research Foundation (ANSRF) is the only organization solely dedicated to preserving and performing the American Negro Spiritual in its original form. ANSRF sustains this culturally potent musical art form as an important aspect of American folk heritage and expands public awareness of the Spiritual's singular beauty.

History of ANSRF
ANSRF was founded in 1989 by Francois Clemmons and received its non-profit status in 1992. As a professional singer of opera and Spirituals, Mr. Clemmons received numerous requests for recordings, songbooks of "authentic" Spirituals and live performances. It was clear that not enough was being done to preserve the legacy of the American Negro Spiritual. The foundation now fulfills requests for concerts, songbooks and recordings of American Negro Spirituals as well as books and research materials regarding Spirituals.

Many Americans, regardless of race, are not sure what differentiates a Spiritual from gospel music, do not realize the historical and cultural legacy of the Spiritual, and do not recognize this important contribution to American folk culture. For these reasons, ANSRF programs, including public concerts and shows for children, focus on educational activities.

With the world renowned Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, a performing arts ensemble which Francois Clemmons also founded, ANSRF developed an educational concert which teaches children of all ages about the history and cultural importance of the Spiritual.

A prestigious Advisory Board and Board of Directors governs and advises the foundation. ANSRF is administered by Executive Director Helen Rubino and Founder/Director Francois Clemmons. Donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Programs
To fulfill its mission, ANSRF operates several programs, including cultural enhancement, education and preservation.

1. Cultural Enhancement
Public concerts of American Negro Spirituals form the backbone of ANSRF's programs. Concerts in a variety of venues by professional choral groups sustain the Spiritual as a culturally potent musical form. Besides their entertainment value, the concerts enlighten audiences throughout the world about the history and cultural influence of the Spiritual.

ANSRF organizes concerts in traditional settings, such as churches and concert halls, as well as unconventional locations such as homeless shelters and inner-city public schools. Each January, a public concert of Spirituals in New York City commemorates the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Numerous ensembles and individual performers participate.

2. Education
Educating children about American Negro Spirituals is one of ANSRF's most important goals. ANSRF produces concerts of Spirituals in public schools or after-school children's programs. Concerts are usually given by the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble, ANSRF's primary performing arts partner.

Educational programs present the history and cultural significance of the Spiritual during the Slavery era, the Civil Rights Movement and today. Different voice categories are demonstrated. The program combines a concert of spirituals with an informal lecture and student participation. The program also drives home the importance of recognizing and sharing human values. Concerts are tailored for different age groups, and a Q & A period follows each performance.

Director Francois Clemmons has extensive teaching experience, including on television, where he has appeared on the award winning program Mister Rogers' Neighborhood as Officer Clemmons for the last 24 years.

3. Preservation
ANSRF sustains an important African-American contribution to the American folk heritage. Spirituals are preserved through commissioning new arrangements or new works which integrate Spirituals into original music. ANSRF recently commissioned Sisters of Freedom composed by Linda Twine, a 30 minute work focusing on the role of women in the struggle for emancipation.

Artists, conductors, scholars and other members of the cultural community have expressed a need to record Spirituals and collect materials related to them in a systematic way to ensure that current and future generations may have access to them. ANSRF's preservation library contains a growing collection of recordings in numerous versions and arrangements, songbooks, books and other research materials related to the legacy of the Spiritual.

ANSRF encourages ensembles around the country to exchange information and technique on Spirituals. ANSRF's songbook of Spirituals provides authentic arrangements so that ensembles nationwide may add Spirituals to their repertoire.

Spirituals continue to teach stories of tolerance, understanding and freedom, which are important lessons for all generations. As an anonymous Nineteenth Century author wrote, "Where Spirituals are sung and heard, the people are free!"
What is a Spiritual?

The American Negro Spiritual is one of America's original musical forms. Created by slaves in rural plantations of the Antebellum South, the Spiritual drew heavily upon traditional African and European church music. The intricate four-part harmonies of European music intermingled with the communal aspect of African oral traditions. Thus a distinctive American, rural-based folk music was born.

As new generations of slaves were born, the influence of African traditions diminished and American culture was accepted along with its religion, Christianity. Slaves heard Biblical stories and, echoing African oral tradition, put the stories to music to help themselves through daily hardships. Numerous songs outlined tales of woe and hardship, while others were based on Biblical stories that celebrated the strength of faith and family. These new ritual songs became known as Spirituals.

Spirituals also came to be used as a conveyance of hidden messages. Lyrics became codes used by the "Underground Railroad" to help slaves escape to the north. Later, Spirituals served as an integral part of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Since their birth, Spirituals have been modified and adapted by popular, gospel and folk artists. Many contemporary settings of Spirituals use modern harmonies, "correct" and precise English and other adjustments. The American Negro Spiritual Research Foundation preserves and performs Spirituals in their authentic version. Approximately 700 Spirituals exist, and when presented in their truest form, no amplification is used. Sparse musical accompaniment includes only a piano and a drum.

American Negro Spiritual Research Foundation Inc.

François Clemmons
Founder/Director

Advisory Board

Florence E. Quivar
Honorary Chairperson
Faye Lee Robinson
Honorary Chairperson
Therman Bailey
Alpha Brawner-Floyd
Ronald A. Crutcher
Wilhelmenia Fernandez
Jasmine Guy
Benjamin Matthews
Patricia Miller
George Shirley
Walter J. Turnbull

Board of Directors

Carl E. Brown
S. Charles Dickinson
Ron Gibson
Molly Gordy
Jane Gullong
G. Alan Klaum
Leo V. Marzen
Betty McCormick
John Messenger
Rob Mickelsen
Mary Murray
Alexander Prout
Joan Robinson
Arthur Thompson

Helen Rubino
Executive Director

Recent contributors include the following:

Aaron Diamond Foundation
Daniele Agostino Foundation
McFeely-Rogers Foundation
Merrill Lynch & Company Foundation
Mid-America Arts Alliance
New York Community Trust
NYNEX
The Sprint Foundation
Westside Chamber of Commerce

Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

ANSRF extends thanks to all its supporters and volunteers.

For more information, please call (212)749-3657.