

American Spiritual Ensemble



25th Anniversary Season



2019 | 2020 Report

Table of Contents

Letter from the Founder/Director	1
Our Mission	3
History of ASE	4
Director's Biography	5
Manager's Biography	7
Assistant Director's Biography	9
Performance Formats	10
Performance History	11
Voices of ASE	8
Educational Outreach	10
Recordings	11
Tour Dates	12
Proposed Future Activities	14
Letters from Past Venues	
Note of Thanks	15



From the Founder/Director

Music has always been a prominent part of my household and life. Growing up in Montgomery, Alabama, during the Civil Rights Movement, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand music's powerful storytelling; to comfort people, to change lives, and to spur a movement. The American Spiritual Ensemble (ASE) began as a dream I had of preserving the music of the American negro slaves. ASE's mission is to keep the American negro spiritual alive.

To that end, we travel nationally and internationally celebrating the music of the American negro slave. Our efforts aim to preserve the music of a culture that was enslaved and forced to come to America over 400 years ago. We also celebrate the many forms that this music has taken since its creation. Enslaved people were not permitted to speak their native language, sing their traditional songs, or play their instruments. Often times, individuals were separated from their families and stripped of their ways of life, forcing them to create new ways of communication in order to survive.

As they adjusted and incorporated some of their culture into their lives, spirituals were born. These songs became sources of comfort, hopes, and communication; songs of direction and faith. Today,

there are over 6,000 negro melodies; around 3,000 of said melodies have been documented while many more were passed down through oral tradition.

It has now been over 400 years since the first enslaved African person set foot on American soil. Today, it is our privilege to be able to perform these songs, tell their stories, and share our love for the beautiful creations with the world.



ASE's Mission

The mission of the American Spiritual Ensemble is to preserve and continue the tradition of storytelling through the performance and preservation of the American negro spiritual. Performing these spirituals serves as a tribute to the many lives lost or destroyed during slavery in the United States; a horrible time for human kind. These songs, a combination of African, American, and European traditions, create a new type of melody in which a sense of identification was created within the enslaved community. These songs now stand as a testament of the strength found through faith during times of hardship as well as a unifying force among all peoples. These songs are beloved all around the world.

The American Spiritual Ensemble commits to aiding in the preservation of these beautiful melodies through performances worldwide as well as through education in the form of: lectures, master classes and vocal instruction for educational, religious, and community institutions worldwide.

Our History

The American Spiritual Ensemble was founded in 1995 in order to maintain and honor the music pioneered by enslaved African people. ASE is a critically-acclaimed ensemble that is dedicated to performing provocative, dynamic concerts around the world celebrating the American negro spiritual.

Additionally, ASE frequently visits educational institutions in order to teach students about the history and traditions of enslaved people in America and their spirituals. ASE also presents master classes, television performances, radio performance, and interviews on the music of the American negro slave.



About ASE's Founder & Director

Dr. Everett McCorvey, tenor, is the founder and director of the American Spiritual Ensemble. A native of Montgomery, Alabama, he received his degrees from the University of Alabama, including a Doctorate in Musical Arts.



Vocal Excellence is a hallmark of Dr. McCorvey's work. As a teacher he has given master classes and vocal workshops throughout the United States, Europe, South America, China, Japan, and Poland. Dr. McCorvey is the founder and Music Director of the American Spiritual Ensemble. McCorvey recently produced a CD Anchored in the Lord featuring singers from the Bay View Music Festival's American Negro Spirituals Intensive Program, where McCorvey serves as Director.

His career has spanned all areas of the performing arts industry, from performing to musical directing, vocal teaching, producing,

impresario, conducting, union representing, administrative work, and mentoring.

Dr. McCorvey is of the belief that every citizen in the country should find ways to give back to his or her community, city, or country. He has been very active in his volunteer activities working to keep the arts as a part of the civic conversation and currently serves on many [local](#), regional, and national boards. He holds an Endowed Chair in Opera Studies/Director of Opera and Professor of Voice at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, Kentucky.

Dr. McCorvey is also entering his seventh season as the Artistic Director of the National Chorale of New York City. Celebrating over 50 years of great choral singing, the National Chorale is a symphonic choir which performs at Lincoln Center in New York City. The National Chorale is a well-known in New York and around the region for its performances of the great choral titans as well as for the popular New York Messiah Sing-In at Lincoln Center! The Sing-In is one of the oldest sing-in's in the country.

About ASE's Manager

Peggy Stamps has been the business manager of the American Spiritual Ensemble for 15 years. She is also the founder and owner of The SquarePeg Group, Inc., a New York City based talent management company. The SquarePeg Group, Inc. represents a select group of actors who have appeared in feature film, television, and Broadway productions. Stamps has an extensive background in entertainment, including 15 years as the director of a regional Emmy Award winning Broadway Musical Review. Early in Peggy's career she served 5 years as a high-tech product spokesperson on QVC and the Canadian Home Shopping Channel.



Peggy founded the SquarePeg Group, Inc. in 2010 and within 10 years developed a client base with recent credits including feature films *The Photograph*, *How to Be Single*, *Hidden Figures*, and *Birth of Deceit*. Television credits include *Wu-Tang: An American Saga*,

Lincoln Rhyme: Hunt for the Bone Collector, FBI, Power III, and Nickelodeon's Butterbean's Café. Stage credits include Tina Turner: The Musical, The Lion King Broadway Tour (4 clients), Waitress Broadway, Mean Girls Broadway, and Cinderella Broadway.

In addition to managing, Peggy freelances as a stage director/choreographer and as the casting director for projects produced by clients. She is an active member of the Talent Managers Association (TMA). Peggy is a graduate of Purdue University Schools of Engineering and retired from a Fortune 100 high tech corporation in 2010.

About ASE's Assistant Director

Jeryl Cunningham is the Assistant Director and a regular soloist for the American Spiritual Ensemble. She has recorded several CDs with ASE and was an integral part of the widely viewed PBS documentary *The Spirituals* in 2007.



Ms. Cunningham received her bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance from Oakwood University. She obtained her master's degree in Vocal Performance from Mannes College of Music; and has completed a doctoral degree from the University of Kentucky.

Jeryl Cunningham's vocal artistry has been heard in more than ten countries and on four continents. Her versatile and vibrant voice, paired with her fervent advocacy of African American music, makes her a favored soloist for leading ensembles, including the Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*, The Boys Choir of Harlem, and The American

Spiritual Ensemble; and prestigious venues, including the United Nations, Lincoln Center, and Carnegie Hall.

Ms. Cunningham's repertoire encompasses opera, oratorio, choral masterworks, jazz, and art song. But, interpretation of the African American spiritual is a high point of her artistry, drawing on her rich heritage. Her debut CD entitled, *Stand the Storm: Anthems, Hymns and Spirituals of Faith and Hope* was released in 2016.

Dr. Everett McCorvey, producer of the new album, founder and music director of the American Spiritual Ensemble, is a champion of Jeryl's artistry, asserting: "*Jeryl is one of the true vocal artists of this generation. Her silvery soprano voice floats with great ease throughout all of the registers. Every song on her new recording is a master class in vocal technique, legato singing, and skillful vocalism. Her album was a joy to produce and a joy to experience.*"

Performance Formats

The American Spiritual Ensemble participates in a wide range of concert formats, allowing both performers and listeners to experience the beautiful melodies of our past as well as the history of African Americans in different ways. ASE has had the opportunity to perform in the following formats:

Spirituals: classical arrangements of traditional American negro spirituals in choral and solo format

Broadway: selections of Broadway pieces that highlight the African-American experience as well as celebrate human perseverance through faith

Jazz: jazz music that was composed, arranged, or written by African-American artists

Opera: arias and other choral repertoire in which the African-American experience is discussed



Celebrating 25 Years of Music

2020 ushered in the 25th anniversary of the American Spiritual Ensemble. Over the 25 years that the American Spiritual Ensemble has had the opportunity to make and share music, we have been able to bring our melodies to people throughout the world in over 400 performances. These concerts have allowed ASE to perform in a wide variety of venues, which include:

Representative Religious Institutions: Riverside Church in New York, NY; Dexter Avenue King Memorial Church in Montgomery, Alabama; American Cathedral in Paris, France; St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, Ireland; St. Peter in Chains Cathedral in Cincinnati, OH; Temple Adath Israel in Lexington, KY; The Hutterite Community in Farmington, WV; El Escorial in Spain; The Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis in St. Louis, MO; First Presbyterian Church in Lexington, KY; First Plymouth Church in Lincoln, NE

Representative Colleges and Universities: Colgate University in Hamilton, NY; Peabody Institute of The John Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD; The Cincinnati Conservatory of Music in Cincinnati, OH; Centre College in Danville, KY; Bob Jones University in Greenville, SC; Salisbury University in

Salisbury, MD; Miami University in Oxford, OH; Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY; University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, AL; Western Carolina University in Winston Salem, NC; Concordia College in Moorhead, MN; Bethel University in St. Paul, MN; University of Nevada in Las Vegas, NV; Wheaton College in Illinois; and Mercyhurst University in Erie, PA



Performing Arts Centers: David Geffen Hall, Lincoln Center in New York, NY; John F. Kennedy Center for the Arts in Washington, D.C; Warsaw Philharmonic in Poland; Palau de Musica in Valencia, Spain; Wexford Opera House in Wexford, Ireland; Opening Ceremony of Alltech FEI 2010 World Equestrian Games in Lexington, KY (viewed by over 500 million people world-wide) & 2015 World Equestrian Games in Deauville, France; RDS Concert Hall in Dublin, Ireland; Cecilia

Meireles Hall in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Sucre national Theatre in Quito, Ecuador; and Sarasota Opera House in Sarasota, FL



Documentaries: Currently, three documentaries have been filmed by PBS about the American Spiritual Ensemble. These documentaries have helped record the history of the American Negro Spiritual as well as broadcast ASE's music to a wider audience. The names of these documentaries are: *Impresario* (2002), *The Spirituals* (2007), and *The American Spiritual Ensemble in Concert* (2017).



The Voices of ASE

The American Spiritual Ensemble is composed of some of the finest performers in the classical music world. ASE consists of over 125 singers hailing from a wide variety of backgrounds, including; The Metropolitan Opera soloists, Broadway veterans, as well as some of the most prominent voice professors within the United States. As a result, the American Spiritual Ensemble has the opportunity to offer master classes and other assistance in the following areas:



Choral Master Classes: Working on spiritual and choral repertoire with various choirs at colleges and universities all around the world

Voice Master Classes: Mastering vocal techniques



Vocal Coaching: Learning diction, singing in foreign languages, and mastering a variety of musical styles

Guest Leading Roles: Performing as a visiting artist in choice Musical Theatre and Opera productions



Lectures: Lectures covering the history and significance of African American music

Guest Stage and Music Directing: Assisting in offstage duties during Operas, Musical Theatre productions, and Galas



Interim and Guest Choral Directing:

Participating in leadership roles with the choir at various colleges, universities, and religious institutions

Educational Outreach

In terms of Educational outreach and residencies, the American Spiritual Ensemble offers the following opportunities:

Master classes: mastering vocal and choral technique through guided courses

Lectures: a variety of lectures on subjects such as the development of spirituals as an art form as well as how the spiritual was used during slavery in comparison to how it was used during the Civil Rights Movement

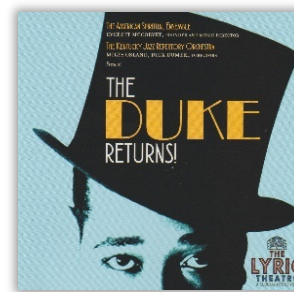
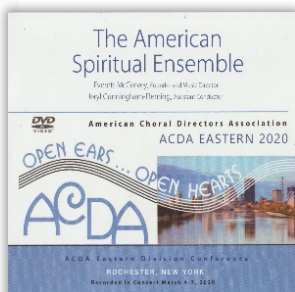
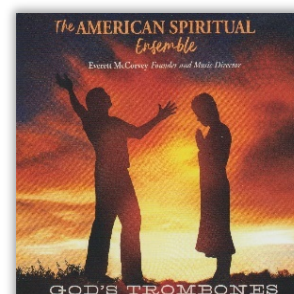
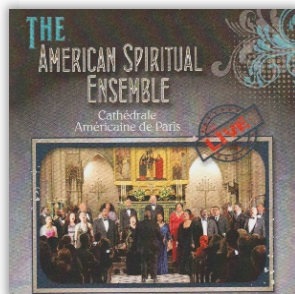
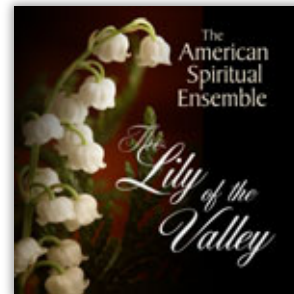
Other Functions: middle school and high school assemblies, College/University convocation performances, etc.



Recordings

The American Spiritual Ensemble can be heard from anywhere at any time thanks to their many world-renowned recordings and CDs, all of which are available for purchase at [the official ASE website](https://www.americanspiritualensemble.com/).

Collectively, ASE has produced over 10 recordings, including:



Winter 2020 Tour Dates

January 28	Covington Highschool, Covington, VA
January 30	George Washington Highschool, Danville, VA
January 31	James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA
February 2	Secrest Auditorium, Zanesville, OH
February 3	Stocker Arts Center, Elyria, OH
February 6	First Baptist Church of Corbin, Corbin, KY
February 11	Peabody Institute, Miriam A. Friedberg Concert Hall, Baltimore, MD
February 15	University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
February 17	First Presbyterian Church, Lexington, KY
February 20	First United Methodist Church, Montgomery, AL
February 28-29	Salisbury University Residency, Salisbury, MD
March 5	Downtown United Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY
March 5-6	American Choral Directors Association Regional Conference, Rochester, NY

March 7

Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, NY

March 8-11

Syracuse University Residency, Syracuse, NY

Due to the spread of COVID-19, some of ASE's activities for this season were altered. The National Association of Teachers of Singing's (NATS) national conference, at which ASE was a featured guest, was held virtually June 24-30. ASE's 17th tour of Spain has also been cancelled.



Proposed Activities for the Future

The American Spiritual Ensemble already has a schedule planned for next season, with even more performances and workshops still being determined! Below is a list of dates of ASE performances for next season.

- January 14-15** Orlando Opera, Orlando, FL
- January 16** Clayton Center for the Arts, Maryville, TN
- January 17** Orlando Opera, Orlando, FL
- January 18** First Presbyterian Church, Elizabethtown, KY
- January 19-20** Diana Wortham Performing Arts Center, Asheville, NC
- January 21-22** Holy Name of Jesus Cathedral, Raleigh, NC
- January 22** Kannapolis Performing Arts Center, Kannapolis, NC
- January 24** Newberry Opera House, Newberry, SC
- January 26** First Baptist Church, Tifton, GA
- January 27-28** Location TBD, St. Simons Island, GA
- January 30** Donald Nixon Center for Performing Arts, Newnan, GA

- February 4** Location TBD, Montgomery, AL
- February 6** Location TBD, Tuscaloosa, AL
- February 10** Swasey Chapel at Denison University,
Granville, OH
- February 19-
20** St. John School of the Arts, Cruz Bay, VI





Letters from Past Tours

