

Concert for Black History Month

Tuesday, February 19, 2013

A Celebration of the Arts for Black History Month will remember the most famous African American performers in Wilson County on Feb. 23 in story and song at Baird Chapel at Cumberland University (CU), from blues guitarist extraordinaire Howlin' Wolf and country harmonica wizard DeFord Bailey to accomplished gospel vocalists Maggie Porter and Thomas Rutling of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers.

The Nashville Blues Society, Carlos Bailey, grandson of DeFord Bailey, Micheal Neal and the Eastern Harmonizers and the CU Chorale ensemble will offer musical tributes, which start with the old Negro spirituals from the mid-1800s before the Civil War until the 1960s peace anthems of the Civil Rights Movement.

The black arts heritage is significant in Wilson County, as Maggie Porter and Thomas Rutling were former slaves who appeared in 1873 with the Fisk Jubilee Singers before Queen Victoria in England. By 1927, DeFord Bailey was the first African American to become a radio regular on the Grand Ole Opry.

Howlin' Wolf trained with the U.S. Army on maneuvers in 1943 at what was once Castle Heights Military Academy in Lebanon. Myles Horton, a white activist who graduated in 1928 from CU, influenced folk singer Pete Seeger. The founder of the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tenn., (now the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tenn.), Horton trained Rosa Parks in nonviolent resistance before the Montgomery (Ala.) Bus Boycott.

Wilson County teachers of the arts in elementary, middle, and high schools will be recognized during the benefit concert. Tickets are \$10 for the evening, which begins at 7 p.m. and lasts until 9 p.m. There will also be a silent auction in the lobby, along with a bake sale by CU history students.

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A Celebration of the Arts is a fundraiser for the restoration of Pickett Chapel, where masters worshipped together beginning in 1829 on the ground floor and their slaves in the balcony. Freed blacks acquired Pickett Chapel in 1866, from which two congregations, First United Methodist Church and Pickett Rucker United Methodist Church, were derived in Lebanon.

The Wilson County Black History Committee (WCBHC) is hosting the night, which is being emceed by Chief James Hambrick of the Mt. Juliet Police Department. Actors Jim Hungate, Lekisha and Aaron Pickett, and Micheal Neal are portraying the living history characters, and JoAnn Brown and Patricia Bates are serving as the co-chairs of the show this year.

Pickett Chapel will eventually become the new location of the Roy Bailey African American History Center & Museum for the WCBHC, which has already dedicated a Heritage Peace Garden on the grounds at Market Street in Lebanon. On the National Register of Historic Places, it is also a landmark on The Promised Land Trail on the Discover Tennessee Trails & Byways through Middle Tennessee.