

The Universal Gospel Choir - Biography

The Universal Gospel Choir is a multi-faith, multi-cultural community choir based in Vancouver, British Columbia. This exciting ensemble has been bringing the healing and uplifting power of the world's sacred and social conscience songs to diverse audiences since 1985.

The UGC is renowned for its passionate performances, exciting soloists, and musical authenticity. The choir's repertoire features songs from African-American, Cuban, African, European, Asian, Middle Eastern and Native American traditions. This dynamic musical diversity, combined with the choir's dedication to building community and raising social awareness through song, has garnered the UGC an intensely loyal and ever-increasing fan base.

In 2008 the choir enjoyed packed houses for their annual winter "Yule" and summer "Soulstice" concerts and introduced "gospel karaoke" to a very participatory audience at their annual Community Sing. Past performance highlights include a sold-out concert at the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts (2007) and the Vancouver Jazz Festival with John Boutte (2007 and 2006).

In addition to scheduled public concerts, the UGC has regularly performed free of charge for various social organizations' fundraising efforts and audiences. As part of the choir's Community Outreach Series, the choir has performed on the behalf of organizations such as, Canuck Place, the Vancouver Food Bank, Habitat for Humanity and several Vancouver Downtown East Side Initiatives. Recent concerts include appearances with Shari Ulrich for the Callanish Society (2009) and with Sybil Thrasher for the North Shore Disabilities Association (2008).

In order to honour and authentically express the music of other cultures, the UGC seeks to continually learn and improve in regular workshops with acknowledged masters of gospel and traditional genres (such as Terrence Kelly and Linda Tillery) and in 2004 the choir took a cultural exchange tour to learn from, and perform with, leading choirs in Cuba.

The UGC's first recording, 'The Universal Gospel Choir', was released in 1990, followed by the 'Grace Happens' CD in 1996. 'Grace Happens' features guest soloists Marcus Mosely and Leora Cashe and was nominated for "Best World Music Album" at the 1997 Pacific Music Industry Association Awards. In 2002 the choir released 'The Universal Gospel Choir-Live!' and in 2004, 'Joyful Noise'. The UGC's latest CD, 'May I Be Still', was released in December 2007 and consists of contemplative live concert recordings under the inspired direction of Brian Tate.

Kathryn Nicholson joined the choir as Music Director in September 2007. Her irrepressible spirit and sincerity never fail to delight and touch the soul of enthusiastic audiences. Since 2000 the UGC has enjoyed the brilliant support of resident pianist, arranger and band leader, Diane Lines. Diane, along with seasoned musicians Rob Ferguson on drums and Rene Worst on bass, provides the rhythmic and harmonic foundation for the UGC.

Approaching their 25th anniversary year, the Universal Gospel Choir continues to explore through music what is common - and uplifting - to human experience around the globe, from the wonder of spiritual mysteries to our everyday experiences of community. The joy of that exploration never diminishes and only becomes more relevant with each passing year.