



EIRNS/Dianne Sare

Fisk University Concert 'Let Freedom Sing'

Metropolitan Opera baritone Robert McFerrin and musical Civil Rights leader Sylvia Olden Lee led a tribute to the dignity of man at Fisk University Memorial Chapel in Nashville, Tenn. on Nov. 10, on the fourth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and in celebration of the birthday of Friedrich Schiller, the Poet of Freedom.

Featured in the program were the Nashville Boys' Choir and the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Dr. Reavis Mitchell, of the office of the President of Fisk, opened the concert by noting that Fisk was the first university founded after the Civil War to make the best Classical education available to African-Americans: "The program presented here tonight, is in that tradition of the Fisk Jubilee singers, and of those who had founded our University."

The Fisk Singers are named after the Old Testament *Jubilee*, the fiftieth year, in which all slaves were to be freed and all debts forgiven; in the United States, 1864 was known as the "Year of the Jubilee." By 1874, after traversing the U.S. and Europe, the group of eleven singers, eight of them ex-slaves, had raised the money to build the school.

The musical program began with the Nashville Boys' Choir performing "Come Bow Down and Worship Him." They were followed by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, directed by Delisse Hall, singing "Oh, Freedom," "Precious Lord," and "Wasn't That a Mighty Day?"

McFerrin, Olden Lee Perform

Then Robert McFerrin and Sylvia Olden Lee took the stage to perform from Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, "Cortegiani" from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, and a selection of Hall Johnson spirituals.

Both McFerrin and Olden Lee have ties to Fisk's Classical tradition. Mrs. Lee's great-grandfather, Nelson Merry, was the only Black founder of Fisk, which was set up by the American Missionary Society in 1866. A slave who gained his freedom, Merry also founded the Spruce Street Baptist Church in 1855, the major Black church in Nashville until the 1960's. Liz Merry, Mrs. Lee's grandmother, was one of the original Jubilee Singers. Mrs. Lee's mother, Sylvia Olden, was a piano student at Fisk and one of the finest sopranos of her day. Her father, J. Clarence, was a singer in the famous Fisk

The Fisk Jubilee Singers celebrate "the dignity of man."

Quartet, along with Marian Anderson's great teacher, tenor Roland Hayes.

Mrs. Lee became the first Black professional musician at the New York Metropolitan Opera, as vocal coach in 1954-56, hired just before Marian Anderson's 1955 debut, and was professor at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia for over twenty years. She is known as the teacher and inspiration for dozens of singers, including Kathleen Battle and Jessye Norman.

Baritone Robert McFerrin studied at Fisk University himself; there, after seeing Marian Anderson perform, he decided on the spot, with little knowledge of European music, that he wanted to become a singer of German *lieder* and Italian opera. After further studies at Chicago Musical College, he won the New York Metropolitan Opera's "Auditions of the Air" in 1953. After Anderson's ground-breaking debut as the first Black artist at the Metropolitan, McFerrin became the first African-American male artist at the Met the same year (1955), singing Amonasro in Verdi's *Aida*, and starring in *Rigoletto* and other roles.

Amelia Boynton

Civil Rights heroine Amelia Boynton Robinson was honored in Selma, Ala. on Nov. 14, at a ceremony held at the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute, which opened a month-long Living History Exhibit to celebrate her commitment to Civil Rights. Mrs. Robinson, who is now the vice-chairman of the Schiller Institute, was surrounded by seventy-five family members, friends, and associates during the afternoon program, which featured an exhibit organized around the theme "Footprints to Freedom."

The event recalled the nearly fifty years of fighting for justice for all Americans, which began in the 1930's,