

Bio: BlackNotes

BlackNotes is a music ensemble, based in Washington, DC, that offers a uniquely attractive brand of music and cultural art. With its dynamic blend of soulful singing and spoken word with insightful, and uplifting and progressive messages rooted in African-American and African heritage, along with rich, full musical instrumentation that includes funky grooves, jazzy horns and spicy African drumming, BlackNotes provides an appealing music-message combination.

BlackNotes' repertoire includes music of several different genres, including R&B/soul, jazz, hip-hop and Afrobeat, but some of its music defies classification in a pre-existing genre, which led the group to coin a new genre label—SWARM (Spoken Word; African Rhythms; Melodies)—to describe some of BlackNotes' unique, original compositions, such as "Living Rhythm", a signature tune from their impressive new CD entitled "Legacy".

BlackNotes consists of the following experienced and talented artists: pianist/keyboardist James McKinney, saxophonist Antonio Parker, trombonist Reginald Cyntje; vocalists Michelle (Maimuna) Chatman, Nina Harley, Bashea Imana and Ka'Ba Akintunde; bassist David White; drummers/percussionists Daruba Kenyatte, Kweku Handon, Kofi Handon and Mahiri Fadjimba Keita; dancer Chekejai Coley; and spoken word/poetry/rap artists Lasana and Kamila.

With substantive and progressive messages interspersed throughout their music, BlackNotes' original compositions and unique musical arrangements carry forward the sacred tradition of cutting-edge music-message artists such as Nina Simone, Gil Scott-Heron, Bob Marley & the Wailers, The Last Poets, Sweet Honey in the Rock, and Fela Kuti, the late Nigerian music innovator and activist who is the subject of a recent Toni award-winning Broadway musical, to whom BlackNotes plays tribute with a couple of captivating Afrobeat tracks on their new CD "Legacy".

New CD Release – "LEGACY"

BlackNotes' new release is entitled "*Legacy--BlackNotes Covers the Spectrum*, volume 1." This new offering from BlackNotes takes the group to new dimensions. After listening to this new CD a few times, a music lover commented that *Legacy* is "the best CD I've heard in a long time!" Along with several compelling original compositions, *Legacy* features BlackNotes renditions of several classic songs in the musical legacy of people of African descent, in various genres. *Legacy* includes covers of Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On", Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit", John Coltrane's "Spiritual", Peter

Tosh's "Not Gonna Give It Up", and Fela Kuti's "Mr. Grammar...Is the Boss", along with the classic jazz standard "Afro-Blue" and the Black National Anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing"—all with fresh, unique arrangements that highlight BlackNotes' strengths and let them shine! *Legacy* helps to keep this great music alive and reminds the listener of the power of the musical tradition that these songs represent, and that these songs and their messages are still quite relevant today. The BlackNotes original compositions on *Legacy* are impressive as well, with "The Vision of It" astutely addressing the phenomenon of the election of Barack Obama as President of the USA; with "Living Rhythm" embodying the best of BlackNotes' signature SWARM genre with an infectious tune with super-spicy African drumming and hot horn playing on a tune that salutes, with crafty spoken word and singing, some of the great African-American and African ancestors who struggled for their people's freedom; with "Fela's Fierce Musical message" providing poignant poetry by Lasana summarizing the great Fela Kuti's catalogue of profound Pan-Africanist musical messages on top of a funky, hypnotic Afrobeat groove reminiscent of Fela's music; and with "Post-Captivity", a catchy hip-hop tune insightfully presenting the contemporary conditions of African-Americans as seen through the eyes of a young, talented and aware female hip-hop artist, Kamila, who makes her BlackNotes recording debut on this selection. *Legacy* is a beautiful and powerful offering!

Earlier CD Releases

Founded in 1998 by Lasana K. Mack, based on his desire to blend spoken word/poetry, West African drumming, singing and other musical instrumentation, BlackNotes has two prior recordings, "Insights", released in 2005 and "Miracle in Progress", released in 1999. Both contain all original BlackNotes compositions featuring the group's unique SWARM genre, with themes that address social, cultural, historical and spiritual topics, such as the history of African-Americans' struggles for cultural identity, freedom and justice. Both projects were well-received by listeners. *Insights* received an outstanding review by music critic and acclaimed poet Kenneth Carroll, who wrote that "*Insights* is in the finest tradition of enlightenment and entertainment with songs that are sing-able, danceable, and memorable", and that "*Insights* is a percussive and melodic celebration of...Black music and Black people."

BlackNotes Highlights

- BlackNotes performed to a sold-out audience at Washington, DC's renowned jazz club Blues Alley in 2010, and received several standing ovations and effusive accolades from the audience, including an audience member who said, "I have been to Blues Alley over 40 times and have never seen a performance as good as THAT!"

- BlackNotes maintained a monthly performance series from 2007 to 2009 at Artmosphere Café just outside of Washington, DC, with consistent and enthusiastic support from its audiences.
- BlackNotes performed on the main stage of the annual African American Heritage Festival in Baltimore, Maryland in 2005, 2006 and 2007, sharing the stage with artists such as India Arie, Eryka Badu, Angie Stone, Common, and other renowned artists.
- Numerous selections from *Legacy* and *Insights* have been played regularly by numerous on-air programmers (DJs) on radio station WPFW (in Wash., DC) of the Pacifica national radio network, and BlackNotes music has been played on other radio stations around the country.
- Music from BlackNotes' CD *Insights* was licensed for inclusion in the production of a program on the national cable television network Arts & Entertainment (A&E), a program called "Random 1", and two selections from *Insights* were featured on two episodes of this program in 2005.
- Music from BlackNotes' CD *Insights* was licensed for inclusion in the production and soundtrack of an independent film entitled "Like Water", produced by Vanessa Hill, and is also featured in a documentary on Maulana Karenga, founder of Kwanzaa, titled "Maulana", produced by Derek Lloyd.
- BlackNotes performed at Howard University's Crampton Auditorium in 2005 at an event hosted by actor/activist Danny Glover, sharing the program and the stage with numerous renowned artists, including Sonia Sanchez, Amiri Baraka and Sweet Honey in the Rock.
- An audience member, after her first time seeing BlackNotes perform, wrote: "I attended the BlackNotes performance this past Saturday. It was a truly moving, electric and awesome experience! Thanks to each of you for sharing your inner peace, joy and spirit with the rest of us! Look forward to seeing you again [next month]." (C. Lassiter)

Contact Information

For CDs, booking, or additional information, visit BlackNotes website at www.BlackNotesZone.com or email BlackNotesZone@gmail.com.