



Young, Gifted, and Black Gospel Choir
 Ralph Russell, Director
 Saturday, April 26 at 2 p.m.
 Sebring-Lewis

Forty voices strong, the Young Gifted and Black Gospel Choir will take to the stage of Sebring-Lewis in what Associal Dean of Student Life Michael Sims termed a "gospel extravaganza" this Saturday at 2 p.m.

The YGB gospel Choir had its beginnings in the late 1960's when five or six students came together to form a spiritual group. Students began to find comfort and support in the group and over time it grew into the group that today performs, not only in Grinnell, but all over the country.

Saturday's concert looks to be a very special experience for all involved. YGB will be singing 8-10 songs ranging from traditional spirituals to contemporary gospel music. Saturday's repertoire will include "Glory to Glory" by Fred Hammond, "Expect Your Miracle" by Twinkie Clark, "He Reigns" by Kirk Franklin, and "Real" by Diane White, a guest artist who has worked with YGB in the past.

In addition to White, three other Gospel Choirs will be joining YGB this Saturday: the Shiloh Baptist Gospel Choir from Des Moines, the Washington High School Choir from Cedar Rapids, and the Sam Mack and the Fellowship Chorale from Davenport.

When director Ralph Russell was on sabbatical 3 years ago the director of the Shiloh Baptist Gospel Choir, Barry Jones, stepped in to help Russell keep the group rolling. The two men managed to put together a concert that year in spite of the fact that Russell was in Chicago for a fair amount of the year.

Marlene Jacks, Admissions, sings with the Sam Mack and the Fellowship Chorale. Washington High School's participation is important to YGB because the outreach is an example of the kind of service that YGB offers.

By reaching out to other groups "the choir is putting into practice the mission of the college," said Russell, "to serve, to help the less fortunate."

Such service has long been a focus of the choir. Each spring break the choir goes on tour, visiting schools, churches, nursing homes, and on the most recent tour, a penitentiary. This work is important to the choir because it not only helps others who may not have access to such ministry, but it also educates the choir members by exposing them to a wide variety of backgrounds.

"The tour was the bomb!" said Johnathan Smith '03, assistant director and participant of YGB. "Not only were the audiences touched, but they touched us."

Saturday's concert looks to be another touching and emotional experience in the words of Marieta Fall '03, Joseph Oppong '03, and Smith. For these three members, Saturday will be their last chance to sing with YGB.

"It's like a homecoming for everyone," said Smith of all those coming together for the concert who have helped over the years. "It's going to be an emotional concert because we all have such strong ties...We've really solidified into a family group."

The group has grown in numbers and strength over the past four years since Russell took over the group. YGB is a diverse group of students from many different countries and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Having people from so many different places "really adds to the culture of the group" said Oppong.

Finally, the concert will be special to many because it is dedicated to Derrick Mitchell '05 who is currently serving with the Army reserves.

"He was such a strong contributor to the choir," said Smith. "he just brought so much life to the choir...[we want to show] how important he is to us and that we miss him."

—information collected by Leslie Boyadjian



Actors Juliette Mushi '05, Brett; Lara Janson '05, Frieda Lawrence; and Justin Jeffreys '03, D.H. Lawrence of *I Rise in Flame*, *Cried the Phoenix*.
 photo by David Kennedy

Real life theatre

Balancing theatrical skills with the representation of historical figures proves tough for cast

by Elisa Lensen

When Margo Gray '05 was trying to choose a play to direct, she looked for one with meaning relevant to herself.

I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix, by Tennessee Williams, is about an individual's role as artist and person. Gray selected it for this reason, and the show runs tonight at 7 p.m. in the Wall Performance Lab.

Specifically, the play is a fictional account of the last afternoon and evening in the life of author D.H. Lawrence. Contradictions define Lawrence's roles as artist, husband, and friend, and by obscuring these contradictions the play highlights the overlapping relationships among these roles. Jeffreys plays Lawrence, Lara Janson '05 his wife Frieda, and Juliette Mushi '05 Brett, Lawrence's intellectual companion and follower.

Director, characters, actors

Gray is directing the play to fulfill a requirement for her theater major's required 300-level directing class. She chose *I Rise* because of its themes, but also for technical reasons like its small cast size, length, and minimal special effects.

In the play, Lawrence wrestles with how the masses seem to misunderstand his writings and with miscommunications in his interpersonal relationships. As Jeffreys explained, Lawrence "realizes that[his] writing can't be appreciated for what it truly is now [in 1929] due to social constructs, but that in the future people will understand."

The relationship at the heart of the play, between Lawrence and his wife, is also difficult to understand, for both an audience and the actors. "The relationship is really hot-cold," said Gray. "They both have a lot of passion and it's difficult for college-aged actors to do passion that isn't young passion."

Over 20 college students auditioned for the play's three roles. The decision was "really, really tough," said Gray. But she is more than satisfied with her cast. "The actors have been doing a great job," she said. "They're all really smart... Sometimes people underrate intelligence in an actor."

When fiction meets fact

An ability to extract and interpolate historical and theatrical facts has been very important to this production. "It's difficult to play roles that are real people," Gray said, "especially Lawrence and Frieda."

To get a better or at least broader grasp of the characters, Gray and her cast members spent many hours reading works by and about the Lawrences. Nick Wagner '02.5 served as dramaturge for the production and assisted in compiling the literary resources. Gray said the collaborative efforts have been and continue to be a success.

The biggest reason Jeffreys auditioned for the play was this opportunity to investigate and reconcile Lawrence the non-fictional man and Lawrence the fictional character. "I thought it would be interesting to play someone who actually lived," he said.

Still, *I Rise* remains an original and fictional play. Gray said she made it clear that though the characters are based on real people, the actors still

should adapt the character to the play's atmosphere.

But this can be difficult. "You want to make your character your own," Jeffreys said, "but it's a bit more difficult when you have all this autobiographical information."

Mushi agreed that the different information sources that influence each character make for challenging complexities. "Usually you have made all the discoveries you need to make in your character in two weeks," she said, "but the true essence of Brett's character eluded me for a good part of three weeks of rehearsal."

All actors give credit to Gray for helping the actors find the essence, to understand who and what they are conveying. "Margo is really good at asking us the reasons why we're taking the character in a certain direction," Janson said, "And it's when she asks us these questions that we begin to formulate what we want to do with this play."

The play's direction

This collaboration is what Gray loves the most about her director role. Doing this play, she said, "is a really great opportunity to get a message across, because it's a really collaborative effort. You get to be in charge of organizing these people to produce something that will, hopefully, be meaningful."

Janson said that the meaning woven into *I Rise* is at times difficult to pinpoint and portray, but that it's important to ponder. Because D.H. Lawrence is well known as a misogynist in his writings and his

life, Janson said, she can't portray the relationship between him and Frieda as simple. "This play and Lawrence and the relationship are just full of contradictions," Janson said.

But Janson explained that *I Rise* does not leave its contrasts in opposing isolation. She said that though people often like to "cleave perceptions of Lawrence in two," *I Rise* both forces them together and forces the audience to take note.

In developing her character, Janson had to work through synthesizing another dichotomy. In real life, Frieda was seen as both matron and seductress: she was often mistaken for Lawrence's mother, and yet her memoirs document series of passionate love affairs. Historically, Janson said, "there's always this dichotomy between mother or whore, or sexual or nurturing, but Frieda is both."

Mushi's character Brett also combines contradictions. At first, Mushi said, it is easy to see Brett "as the childish innocent, especially when contrasted with Frieda's sometimes caustic nature"; later, however, Brett is revealed as "multifaceted...capable of jealousy and aggression."

The tensions and the tenderness in these blurred polarities are reasons Jeffreys admires *I Rise*. "It's a good play," he said. "You get to see a very interesting, and what I think a very real, relationship between three people."

Forging a relationship amidst alleged division, between love and hate or the expected and the unexpected, propels *I Rise*. It should also, according to Janson, propel students to attend the performance. "The fact that these ideas are really blurred really makes us think about them," she said, "and I think that's important for Grinnell students to do."

"The relationship [of the characters] is really hot-cold. They both have a lot of passion and it's difficult for college-aged actors to do passion that isn't young passion."

—Margo Gray '05

Will play, not pay, for lessons

by Amanda Davis

Before she came to Grinnell, Laura Chesnut '06 had not taken private singing lessons. Now, in her second semester at Grinnell, she is singing in three campus groups, including one that she helped organize, VOX (formerly The Naturals). Part of the reason Chesnut said she has been able to become so involved in music is that Grinnell has paid for her voice lessons. "I'd never actually studied voice at all," said Chesnut. "I just sang in my high school chorus."

At the beginning of this year, Chesnut was one of five Curd-Hill award winners. The audition-based award is a cash award that covers about 90 percent of a year's worth of 100-level music lessons. The competition in the fall was only for first-years; 12 winners from various classes were announced on April 12 from the spring competition. The top two winners were Timothy Lin '03, who received the Hill Award for Outstanding Instrumentalist and Nick Malinowski '04, who won the James Award for Outstanding Vocalist.

The former Hill award was originally meant to encourage both public speaking and musical performance. Since then, partly as a result of the Curd family request, the competition has become a way

to help music students, though not necessarily music majors, pay for their lessons. The only students who automatically receive free music lessons are junior and senior music majors. "Most feel that that is unfortunate so we're glad we have at least one mechanism to help alleviate it," said Rommereim.

Chesnut, who is a member of the Grinnell Singers, YGB and VOX, said that winning the award two times has been a "complete and wonderful, wonderful shock."

Susan Vescovi '06, another winner, echoed that sentiment. "There was nothing to lose," she said. Even though she thought that the competition was much stiffer with the inclusion of upperclassman like Malinowski and Lin, Vescovi, a "lowly first-year" decided to "take a shot."

A unique thing about the competition, Malinowski said, is that it's based on a single audition. "It's similar to what real-life professional musicians have to do on a daily basis to get work," he said. Since Malinowski hopes to pursue a career as a professional vocalist, he feels that such practice is useful.

Nick Malinowski '04, winner of the James Award for Outstanding Vocalist of this year's Curd-Hill Awards, sings.
photo by David Kennedy

