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THE ELIZABETH CITY STATE UNIVERSITY CHOIR HEADS WEST



The University Choir under the direction of Mr. Billy C. Hines during the Evelyn A. Johnson Choral Festival

-Photo Courtesy of Keisha Williams

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You have heard them singing during the Freshman Candlelighting Ceremony. You have heard them singing during the Founder's Day Programs and the graduation ceremonies. They have performed live in the Fine Arts Auditorium during their annual Christmas Concerts. Now, a very important event has come around for the Elizabeth City State University Concert Choir. It is time for their annual Spring Tour. The University Choir's tour started on Sunday, March 10 and lasted until Saturday, March 16.

The University Choir, under the direction of Mr. Billy C. Hines, has been traveling around the United States, visiting places such as New York, Florida, Delaware, and Indiana. This year, the choir performed westward in Eden, North Carolina; Nashville, Tennessee; Anderson, Indiana; and Cleveland, Ohio. They did not only perform, but they also visited EMI Studios in Brentwood, Tennessee and the National Afro American Museum in Wilberforce, Ohio.

The choir normally practices five days a week from 4:00 to 5:20 in the evening. Because they have been preparing for the tour and their upcoming Spring concert, extra practice time has been necessary. Choir members and Hines expressed their feelings about the westward tour and their experiences with the University Choir a few days before their departure.

Mr. Billy C. Hines, Professor of Music and Director of the University Choir, is in charge of arranging and scheduling the choir's performances. He believes that the choir is ready for this year's tour.

"We're just as prepared as we

always have been," he said.

The choir not only goes on tour each year to sing, but they go to represent the University.

"We go to represent the University in ways that no other group on this campus is able to represent the University," Hines said.

According to Hines, the choir is the leading ambassadors for this University. One of the things that they do during the tours is visit high schools to recruit students to come to the University.

"We reaffirm it's mission through music. Music is our tool to communicate to people that Elizabeth City State University is a fine institution of higher learning and that we intend for talented, skilled young people to come here to this University," said Hines.

Khima Toxey, a senior Psychology major, was a little sentimental as she thought about her last tour with the University choir.

"I am very much looking forward to tour this year," she said.

Toxey has been in the choir since her freshman year. She said that it has been a rewarding experience. Although she will be graduating this May, she said that she will miss being a part of the University choir.

"I am definitely going to miss the choir when I graduate in May," she said. "My experience with the choir has helped to shape and mold me into the confident individual that I am."

Toxey went on to discuss some of the advantages that the choir has provided her with.

"The choir has provided me with traveling opportunities that I would not have had otherwise. Tour is also a time for the choir to become closer and get to know each other a little better," Toxey said. "I have made friends and associates that I never would have met had I not been in the choir. I say this because I am a commuter student, and I would

not have nearly as many close friends that I now have."

Toxey has always appreciated Mr. Billy C. Hines, who is the director of the University choir.

As one of the University choir's veterans, Toxey, said that she thinks of Mr. Hines as "an inspiration and father-figure" to the choir members. Toxey's view of Mr. Hines relates well to his expression of helping his students.

Crystal Foust, a junior Business Administration and Accounting major, expressed her feelings about the tour as well.

"I expect a great tour, because in the past, we have worked hard all year long to prepare for it, and we have worked diligently this year," she said.

"Spring tour gives us the opportunity to network. Every year, we are required to submit a résumé to Professor Hines, which is used to compose a book of résumés, that is presented to interested employers in the states that we visit," Foust said.

Damiyon Sledge, a sophomore Biology/Pre-Medicine major said that he sees the choir as an "elite group representing ECSU to its fullest potential through singing."

"We have a responsibility to give our best performances night in and night out because most places we go, people don't really know that we can sing," Sledge said.

While many people may think that the University Choir only sing and recruit students. That is not their only purpose.

"It's not just a tour for singing, but it also gives you first hand steps as adults entering their area of study through networking with professional people," Sledge added.

Being in the University Choir has many advantages that some people overlook. But one that seems most important to them was the fellowship

with one another and an opportunity to travel.

"It's a great experience to have as a student. It allows you to go to different places and meet new people," said Sledge. "You learn how to interact more as a singing group and you establish a comfort zone with many different members of the choir."

"It's my challenge to try and give them a realistic focus, realistic notion of what life is really all about and how to equip them to be able to go out and make a living and live independently on their own," Hines said.

University Choir as a group believes in helping the University by recruiting students as they travel, trying to network with professionals, and fellowshiping as a family.

But as for the choir's way of helping the University by recruiting students, Mr. Hines expressed his desire for "more monetary support, both in terms of scholarships and budgeting."

"To be able to do the kind of job that the University deserves from us, we need support, we need funding, and we try to encourage alumni to support us as well," he said.

Hines would like to encourage alumni to help the University Choir by sponsoring some of the choir's programs, making or delivering flyers to announce their events, helping to recruit students to come to the University or join the choir, and invite the choir to sing at various church functions. If you would like to assist the University Choir, contact Mr. Billy C. Hines at (252) 335-3359.

The Elizabeth City State University Concert Choir will be performing at their annual Spring Concert on April 21, 2002 at 7:30 p.m. Let us go and support the Elizabeth City State University Concert Choir.