Ensemble to sing spirituals

Fisk alumni, local group to perform 'Circa 1871'

BY BILL THOMPSON
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Preservation of the singular American musical tradition of spirituals has long been the mission of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, vocal artists and students at Fisk University in Nashville whose original incarnation is credited with introducing these African-American "slave songs" to the world in 1871.

They broke racial barriers in the process, here and abroad, entertainment- ing audiences and the royalty of Europe with equal aplomb. They also raised funds in support of the college, which was founded at the end of the Civil War to educate freed slaves and other young blacks.

In observance of Black History Month, the singers' past and present will be celebrated by the Charleston Symphony Orchestra Spiritual Ensemble, which joins with Fisk University alumni Saturday for the tribute performance "Circa 1871: Ode to the Fisk Jubilee Singers," directed by Nathan L. Nelson.

The curtain rises at 6 p.m. at Circular Congregational Church, 150 Meeting St. Tickets:
Adults: $20; students, $10. Visit www.circular- church.org or call 843-853-4111.

University alumni Saturday for the tribute performance "Circa 1871: Ode to the Fisk Jubilee Singers," directed by Nathan L. Nelson. The curtain rises at 6 p.m. at Circular Congregational Church, 150 Meeting St.

In 2007, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, as a cappella ensemble, sojourned to Ghana at the invitation of the U.S. Embassy, where members helped celebrate Ghana's Golden Jubilee. The next year, the group was honored with the National Medal of Arts, the nation's highest honor for artists and patrons of the arts.

"Although John Work III was the musical director in all the Jubilee Singers' illustrious history, many noted successors have led the group to continue its legacy," says Nelson.

"I am honored to conduct this performance in honor of a group I consider 'grandparents of the spiritual,'" he says. "Even as gospel music became the norm throughout the African-American community, the Jubilee Singers continued to nurture this uniquely American genre."

Featured will be a guest appearance by New York-based soprano Roberta Laws and University of Michigan professor, Sumterville native and bass-baritone Daniel Washington, performing classic spirituals ranging from works by Jester Hairston to John Work.

Dr. Leonard Davis Fisk (1858) and Norma Sallust Davis Fisk (1960) will serve as honorary alumni hosts for a segment of performance and a reception following the concert.

Reach Bill Thompson at 937-5707.

The soul of Cuba

Colorfully dressed Cuban women enjoy their cigarettes while socializing.

BY MARGARET FORD ROGERS
Special to The Post and Courier

Cuba is a country rich in imagery. It is the essence of rustic beauty, lush topography and dazzling sensuality. It is a country filled with a population that is culturally sophisticated, highly educated and, in the midst of poverty, generous.

The country's soul is palpable. You sense it in its music, its dance, its art, even in the beauty, energy and pace of the country and its people: the grand Cristobal Colon Monument.

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Exhibit to showcase 24 Cuban artists

BY BILL THOMPSON
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Twenty-four artists, mostly young, with a compelling interest in social issues, an understanding of how art influences perception and a commitment to it as a vehicle of change.

If that sounds like a recipe for dynamic, unsettling, cutting-edge work, you would not be mistaken.

Opening Friday at the City Gallery at Waterfront Park and running through March 28, the touring exhibition "Polaridad Complementaria: Recent Works From Cuba" serves to introduce North America to a new generation of Cuban artists whose work already is being felt.

The exhibition is composed largely of recent works, much of it having been shown at the Havana Bienal Art Exhibition in 2009," says Charleston native David Fuchs, president of Washington, D.C.-based International Arts & Artists, which develops and circulates fine art exhibitions to institutions throughout the U.S. and abroad.

Curated by the Centro de Arte Contemporaneo WiFredo Lam, Havana, and mounted by IAA, the exhibit showcases the work of two dozen of the island's established and rising artists and talents. It features more than 40 works of painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, video

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Exhibit to showcase 24 Cuban artists

"Mente Abierta/Open Mind" (2006-2008), P.V.C. metallic painting and lead by Yoan Capote.

"Untitled" (2007), digital print by Rene Pena.

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5

Terrace
The King's Speech
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The Fighter
The Artist
Black Swan

127 HOURS
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and installation art that underscores the "serious aesthetic and conceptual concerns that characterize Cuban art today."

"These artists are not all accessible to audiences in the United States," says Furchgott. "North Americans are not always aware of this contemporary work, as most of it has not been circulated here."

To be able to see an exhibition of this work of this magnitude is remarkable. Some of these artists have phenomenal reputations in other parts of the world but are little known in the U.S. One of the illusions we have here is that just because we have imposed an embargo on Cuba, everyone else has, too."

Apart from garnering international recognition, many of the artists have participated in fairs and biennials abroad. All have shown their work in Europe and Latin America and have been featured in various editions of the Havana Biennial. Among their number, Rene Pena, Abel Barroso, Alimee Garcia, Yoan Capote, Eduardo Puntran, Lazaro Saavedra, Sandra Ramos and Roberto Pabello also have exhibited in the United States.

Often compared to American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe with regard to the use of light, Pena explores the relationships between individuals within society and the struggle for their own identity.

Employing wood as a medium, Barroso carves three-dimensional pieces while using varied printing methods to create a conversation about technology and the Third World.

For his part, Duvier delgado melds drawing with handmade 3-D designs "examining the unattainable," whether in the realms of the material or idealized.

Together, working in diverse media and exploring multiple and invisible spaces, the artists forge a narrative of contemporary Cuba. Through dialogue and cultural exchange, the artists are fortifying a conversation about the United States.

IAA was established to help facilitate such purposes. Founded by Furchgott, son of Marrero and the wife of the Furchgott of Charleston, IAA is a nonprofit arts service organization "dedicated to increasing cross-cultural understanding and exchange of arts internationally, through exhibitions, programs and services to artists, art institutions and the public."

IAA exhibitions most often are commissioned in whole or in part by museums and cultural organizations. Its inaugural exhibition was held here in 1996 during the Spoleto Festival USA. Furchgott notes that the "idea of bringing the exhibition to the U.S. originated in Charleston."

"We had hoped to bring this exhibit to Charleston at the beginning of last year but could not get everything in order in time," he says. "In fact, the idea is on the part of Ellen Dressler Morly, who I've known for years, and the city's Office of Cultural Affairs, support group, the artist and the publisher."

Furchgott says he will leave that for the audience to interpret. "The idea is that it can be interpreted in several ways, but is 'complementary' in the sense that things can be viewed both in terms of the way we feel about Cuba and the way the artists and people of Cuba see things."

Following its Charleston run, the exhibition travels to the Houston Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Va. (Dec. 24-March 18, 2012), and Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, Kan. (April 7-July 1, 2012).