



UC DAVIS PRESENTS
Community Outreach Program

• 2000-2001 School Matinee Series •

Mighty Clouds of Joy

Wednesday, January 24, 2001

Freeborn Hall, UC Davis 11:00 am

Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this Teacher's Guide helpful in preparing your students for what they will see and hear at the Mighty Clouds of Joy matinee. The Guide provides background information on the artists and a review of theater conventions and audience protocol. The matinee, which is specially designed for children, will introduce this legendary quartet, The Mighty Clouds of Joy, that, over the last 40 years, has pioneered a contemporary gospel sound and style.

The performance can provide a number of departure points for various areas of study, including the arts, humanities, American and world history and the appreciation of different cultural perspectives and traditions.

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MIGHTY CLOUDS OF JOY

The Mighty Clouds of Joy, formed in the late 1950s, was one of the first groups to modernize the gospel quartet tradition by incorporating soul and funk elements into their music. The Mighty Clouds have certainly been the most visible of gospel acts, performing on nearly every major American television show, including *The Grammy Awards*, *Soul Train*, *CBS Special*, *Prime*

Time Country, PBS Special, The Johnny Cash Show, Mike Douglas, Merv Griffin Show, Lou Rawls Parade of Stars, and the Arsenio Hall Show. The group has also collaborated with many of the best rhythm & blues and rock artists of the last half century: Aretha Franklin, Al Green, Ray Charles, Marvin Gaye, Earth, Wind & Fire, the Rolling Stones, and Paul Simon. Five-time winners of Grammy Awards and with over 25 successful albums behind them, The Mighty Clouds of Joy remain “fresh, alive and timeless, a living history of gospel quartet singing” (*Billboard*).

Alabama native Joe Ligon is a founding member and sings lead vocals for Mighty Clouds of Joy. Although musically gifted as a boy, he was too shy to perform in public, preferring to vocalize only around the house and in the nearby fields. When a group of his singing cousins asked him to join them, it was Ligon’s mother who insisted he agree and who unknowingly launched one of the greatest careers in gospel music. Ligon’s father also contributed to his son’s success, inspiring the Clouds’ lead off single, “Meeting Tonight.” According to Ligon, prior to the week-long church revivals, his father would walk through town shouting, “There’s gonna be a meeting tonight!”

At age 14, Ligon moved to Los Angeles where he met Johnny Martin. Ligon, Martin, and two friends formed a quartet, and began singing in the neighborhoods and, later, throughout the Southwestern United States. While the members were still in their late teens, the group was heard by a local gospel deejay who made their first recording and sent it to Peacock Records, home to other classic gospel acts (the Blind Boys, the Nightingales and the Dixie Hummingbirds). Sensing something fresh and unique in the Clouds, Peacock contracted their first single, “Steal Away to Jesus,” in 1960 and issued their debut album, *Family Circle*, the following year.

Dynamic and animated on stage, the Mighty Clouds of Joy were one of the first quartets to incorporate movement and choreography into their act. In bright, color-coordinated outfits, the Clouds coupled a new level of showmanship with their ministry—earning themselves the title “The Temptations of Gospel.” In addition, the Clouds have introduced other innovations over the years: They were the first to add bass, drums, and keyboards to the traditional quartet accompaniment of solo electric guitar. Though more traditional members of gospel audiences were critical, the Clouds have dared to align their artistic vision and religious mission.

Since 1961, The Clouds have released dozens of albums. In 1996, quartet music supporters gathered in Birmingham, Alabama, for the Fourth Annual American Gospel Convention Awards Night and Hall of Fame Inductions. Joe Ligon was inducted and presented with the Key to the City of Birmingham. That same year, the Clouds joined the Williams Brothers and Slim & The Supreme Angels in an historic recording which was released as a collector’s album, *Together As One: A Tribute to the Heritage of Quartet Music*, and which went on to rank number three on Billboard charts.

After 40 years singing gospel, the Mighty Clouds of Joy still have the power to excite and inspire their ever-increasing following. Joe Ligon articulates the group's mission: "We see ourselves as singers who minister to the people and encourage them. . . .People today seem hungry for much more than entertainment. With all the terrible things happening in the world now, their souls are looking for nourishment. . . .for something to believe in."

GOSPEL MUSIC

Gospel music is a uniquely African-American contribution to American culture. Dating from the time of the Depression in the 1930s, gospel grew out of the music and oratory of church worship services and the spiritual and blues tradition. The immediate impetus for gospel music seems to have been the rise of Pentecostal churches at the end of the 19th century. Pentecostal shouting is related to speaking in tongues and to circle dances of African origin. Recordings of Pentecostal preachers' sermons were immensely popular among American blacks in the 1920s, and recordings of them along with their choral and instrumental accompaniment and congregational participation persisted, so that ultimately gospel reached the white audience as well. The voice of the black gospel preacher was affected by black secular performers, and vice versa. Taking the scriptural direction "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord" (Psalms, 150), Pentecostal churches welcomed timbrels, pianos, organs, banjos, guitars, other stringed instruments, and some brass into their services. Choirs often featured the extremes of female vocal range in antiphonal counterpoint with the preacher's sermon. Improvised recitative passages, melismatic singing, and extravagant expressivity also characterize gospel music.

Other forms of gospel music have included the singing and acoustic guitar playing of itinerant street preachers; individual secular performers, sometimes accompanied by bands; and harmonizing male quartets, usually singing a cappella, whose acts included dance routines and stylized costumes.

Among the most prominent of gospel music composers and practitioners were Thomas A. Dorsey, born in 1899, a prolific and best-selling songwriter whose works include, most notably, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"; the Reverend C.A. Tindley (1851-1933), composer of "I'll Overcome Someday," which may have served as the basis for the anthem of the American Civil Rights Movement, "We Shall Overcome"; the Reverend C.L. Franklin of Detroit, who issued more than 70 albums of his sermons and choir after World War II; blind Reverend Gary Davis

(1896-1972), a wandering preacher and guitar soloist; Sister Rosetta Tharpe, whose guitar and vocal performances took gospel into nightclubs and concert theatres in the 1930s; Roberta Martin, a gospel pianist based in Chicago with a choir and a school of gospel singing; and Mahalia Jackson (1911-72), who toured internationally and was often broadcast on television and radio.

ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees for 2000-2001 have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;

- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) How would you describe gospel music to a friend?
- 2) What feelings did you have while you listened to the singing and the music?
- 3) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?
- 4) Write a poem expressing your impressions of the performance: what you saw (the singers and musicians, the costumes and instruments); what you heard (the songs and music) and the kinds of feelings and thoughts you had during the show.

CAMPUS RESOURCE GUIDE

The University of California, Davis campus is a very beautiful and interesting place to visit and there are many learning experiences available to young student visitors. We have listed some of these below. While on campus, consider taking advantage of these resources. The enclosed campus map can help you find the locations.

Transportation and Parking Services (TAPS) 752-8277

Private cars may park in several lots on campus for \$4.00. Please call Sandy Morgan (752-7657) to arrange for bus parking.

Places to Eat *(Please call ahead if you have a large group)*

On Campus: Coffee House, Memorial Union (752-6622)
Silo Student Union (752-1900)

In Davis: Carl's Jr., Sub City, Pizza Hut, Brennan's Coffee, Taco Bell, Le Crepe

Art Galleries *(Please call ahead for current exhibits and possible tours)*

Design Gallery (Walker Hall) is an innovative space known for its exciting exhibitions of design-related objects such as architecture, textiles, and folk art. 752-6150

Richard L. Nelson Gallery (Art Building) is located south of Shields Library. It is well known for its regularly changing exhibitions of historical and contemporary works of art. 752-8500

Fine Arts Collection (Art Building) represents various historical periods and cultures as well as houses the Davis campus' major collection of art.

Craft Center (South Silo) provides opportunities for workshops and classes in woodworking, weaving, jewelry-making, art and graphics, computer imagining, ceramics, photography, silk-screen printing, welding, leather-working, stained-glass, and other crafts. There is always a display of students' work. 752-1475

C.N. Gorman Museum (Hart Hall) features changing exhibitions of works by Native American and other diverse artists. 752-6567

Memorial Union Art Gallery (Memorial Union), 2nd floor exhibit. 752-2885

Campus Tours Available

The Tram provides a one-hour tour of the campus for 20-40 people. Reservations should be made one week in advance. The pick-up is at the Buehler Alumni and Visitor Center on Old Davis Road. 752-8222

Animal Barn Tour Program tours are offered during the Spring for classes K-5. The tours consist of visits to three campus locations where cows, pigs, and horses can be observed. Student guides conduct the tours, providing information on the animals. 754-8111

Peter J. Shields Library (located south of the Quad) houses collections in the humanities, arts, social sciences, biological sciences, agricultural sciences, mathematics and computer science. It is one of the premier research libraries in North America. 752-6561

Bohart Museum of Entomology has an educational program about insects. The 60-minute tours can be arranged by appointment only. The museum is located in the Academic Surge Building. Tours use permanent and hands-on exhibits as well as live insects for demonstrations. The primary objective of the educational programs is to teach children about insects, particularly (1) their enormous diversity in form, color, behavior, (2) their impact on daily human life, (3) their importance in ecosystems, and (4) their general harmlessness. Contact Steve Heydon, 752-0493.

California Raptor Center has an on-site program to increase the public's awareness of raptors (birds of prey) and their environment. The facility has a museum containing displays, exhibits, and hands-on materials. The Center is located in South Davis. 752-9994

Davis Arboretum is an 80-acre public garden on the UC Davis campus. The Outdoor Education Program is geared particularly for K-6 class visits and uses the "guided discovery" approach to increase children's awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the natural world. 752-4880

Equestrian Center (located on Garrod Road near the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital) provides instruction in both English and Western riding along with training in horse care and stable management. 752-2372

Environmental Horticulture Teaching Gardens, located on Old Davis Road next to the Alumni Center, are opened to the public and include common and unusual species of trees, shrubs, ground covers, perennial, and bedding plants. The arrangement of plants is based on botanical and horticultural principles rather than on design principles. Tours last a half hour and are suitable for 5th grade through high school students. 752-0349

This Teacher's Guide was written by ANETT JESSOP, Department of English, UC Davis