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Symphony Choir to Present “Spiritual Negro: A Cry for Freedom” Concert

On February 27 and 28, the Bolivian Symphony Choir will present a concert entitled “Negro Spiritual: A Cry for Freedom,” sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, the Symphony Orchestra Foundation, the Embassy of the United States, and the La Paz Municipal Government. The concerts will be offered at the La Paz Municipal Theater free of charge.

The Bolivian Symphony Choir will accompany American vocalist April LaVai, who will also conduct a week-long series of classes on the technical and stylistic aspects of this musical genre.

The concert will comprise Negro Spirituals with arrangements by choir conductor Julio Barragan Saucedo. The arrangements will include the participation of choir, soloist singers, piano, cello, and double bass.

Negro Spiritual

Emerging during the period of African-American slavery, Negro spirituals reflect biblical scenes and Christian characters that were transformed with African mysticism and rhythm, a true musical testimony of faith and a beloved genre that spread throughout the world to nurture the universal choral repertoire. This music offered the slaves, separated from their nations of origin and confined to non-biological families, the ability to face the pain of slavery within a space of creativity and integration that included the performers’ bodies, voices, and emotions. The ability of African-American culture to express pain and deeper feelings through music enabled Negro spirituals to provide expression through music, gestures, movements, and interjections, a real cry for freedom.

April LaVai is a jazz singer, composer, and conductor born in Philadelphia. Her unique style is both reminiscent of jazz vocalists of the past and the brightness of musical expressions of today. With an art rooted in the tradition of gospel, blues, and jazz music, LaVai’s repertoire spans many genres including klezmer, bossa nova, pop, and rock. She graduated from Temple University, where she earned a degree in Jazz Performance Voice. She also obtained a Master’s Degree in Musical Education. With her group, LaVai Ensemble, she has performed in a variety of public and private concerts since its establishment in 2007.