

Does Vancouver Need Soul?

music

by Patrisha Scott

“Vancouver needs soul: music is the instrument to bring out that healing.” So says Checo Tohomaso, director of the Vancouver Outreach Community Soul Gospel Choir. Tohomaso believes that his mission is to help people feel the spirit and joy in the music he plays and sings.

If soul is what the city needs, then the Vancouver Outreach Community Soul Gospel Choir is one way of fulfilling this need. Gospel music is growing in popularity and to date there are numerous gospel groups alive and well in the Lower Mainland.

The Vancouver Outreach Community Soul Gospel Choir was formed in 1996 and consists of approximately 100 members, many of whom are from the North Shore. Members come from different walks of life. They include single mothers and fathers, professionals, artists, teenagers, and children. Some are novice singers and others are experienced vocalists.

The choir rehearses each Sunday at the 10th Avenue Alliance Church in Vancouver. The singers practise a wide range of musical styles: soul, R&B, gospel, Hawaiian, and calypso.

Spirited and soulful renderings of gospel tunes, both traditional and popular, can be heard wafting through the neighbourhood each week — and apparently the locals do not complain!

The choir recently performed a Christmas concert at Lonsdale Quay and participated in a Christmas special on Rogers Community TV. This fall, the choir sang in a series of outdoor shows at the Fringe Festival and were featured in a live broadcast on Vancouver TV. Past performances also include a show with Maya Angelou at the Orpheum and singing a back-up song with Celine Dion at GM Place. As well, the group has recorded a soundtrack for one of the *Highlander* television episodes, and two of their performances have aired on local television.

Along with his commitment to the choir, Tohomaso tours internationally and locally as both a speaker and a performer. He has travelled throughout Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland and has become a regular guest on the North Shore, giving inspirational talks to teenagers at Seycove Secondary, Argyle Secondary, and Carson Graham Secondary schools.

Tohomaso's solo concerts highlight his unique and individual performance style: a provocative blend of high energy rhythm, dance, and soulful musicality.

The choir continues to grow in size and its members routinely commit their time and talent to rehearsals of up to two or three hours weekly, on top of their performances. Singing a wide roster of gospel tunes with the gospel tradition of hand clapping along with energetic rhythmic movement, the choir perform with a spirit of fun and exuberance.

You are in for a memorable night the next time the choir performs. Don't miss it! ☺

Please phone 876-3363 for information about upcoming performances.

Patrisha Scott is a singer and actor who currently works in corporate marketing.

The Vancouver Outreach Community Soul Gospel Choir performs a concert, October 1997



Photograph: Fred Lynch