

THE INSPIRATIONAL CHOIR

# WE NEED HEALING



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2026 • 3:00 PM



THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH  
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

# THE INSPIRATIONAL CHOIR

## **WE NEED HEALING**

Sunday, February 22, 2026 at 3:00 PM

**Nedra Olds-Neal**, *conductor*

**Matt King**, *piano*

**Jonathon Peretz**, *percussion*

**Tash Neal**, *guitar*

**Mark Peterson**, *bass guitar*

### **PROGRAM**

Holy, Holy Richard Smallwood

Let There Be Peace On Earth Jill Jackson-Miller & Sy Miller  
arr. Shelton Becton

Sherrie Strange-Pratt, *soprano*

He's Blessing Me Norris O. Garner

Rev. Freeman Palmer, *tenor*  
Shari Gill, *alto*

Shake The Devil Off Dorothy Norwood & Johnny Thompson  
Shari Gill, *alto*

Church Medley arr. Donnie McClurkin

Rev. Freeman Palmer, *tenor*

I Can' Tarry Traditional Spiritual  
arr. Stacey V. Gibbs

Tenors & Basses

Prayer Rev. Adriene Thorne

God Is On Our Side Andrae Crouch & Luther Hanes  
arr. J. Daniel Smith

Give Up & Let Jesus Take Over	Howard Goodman
Erika Johnson, <i>soprano</i> Shari Gill, <i>alto</i> Rev. Freeman Palmer, <i>tenor</i>	
He's An On Time God	Dottie Peoples
Shari Gill, <i>alto</i>	
Anthem of Praise	Richard Smallwood
We Need a Healing	Carl MaultsBy
I Love To Praise Him ( <i>In Memoriam to David Vaughn</i> )	Jessy Dixon
David J. Vaughn, <i>tenor</i> Michael Neal, <i>trumpet</i> Ron Metcalf, <i>piano</i>	
The Potter's House	Tramaine & Walter Hawkins
Shari Gill, <i>alto</i> Erika Johnson, <i>soprano</i>	

**This concert is presented in honor of David Vaughn**

## **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

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**The Inspirational Choir** has been in existence since 1981. It provides members of The Riverside Church community the opportunity to explore their interest in the African American tradition of religious musical expression. The group is open to all members of the community regardless of race, creed, color or experience. The membership is comprised of people with varying levels of musical ability. However, all share a commitment to explore the historical and social significance of this particular musical genre.

The Inspirational Choir has produced an annual concert for the past forty-two years. The Riverside Church Inspirational Choir was honored to accept an invitation from Richard Gere to perform for his eminence the Dalai Lama, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in the fall of 1991. In 1992, the choir returned to the Cathedral to participate in a memorial service for master puppeteer Richard Hunt of Sesame Street and The Muppets fame. Also joining in the celebration of Richard Hunt's life were South Africa's Ladysmith Black Mambazo and the Muppets. Members of the choir participated in the Prince of Egypt video with Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey in 1999. The Inspirational Choir was invited to participate in Reggie Workman's

African American Legacy Concert revisiting music of John Coltrane's Africa/Brass in a performance at Damrosch Park on August 27, 1999. On November 17, 2004, the Choir was one of the choirs invited to perform for the 50th Anniversary of the Fortune 500 list at Rose Hall at Jazz at Lincoln Center with Marvin Hamlisch. The Choir was honored to be invited to perform a Christmas concert at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on December 21, 2005, and was also invited to perform concerts at the New-York Historical Society in conjunction with the Slavery In New York Exhibition on February 19, 2006, and New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War Exhibition on February 17, 2007. In December of 2008, the Inspirational Choir was invited to sing eight performances of Revelations with the Alvin Ailey Dance Company for its 50th Anniversary at City Center in NY.

The Inspirational Choir was invited to perform at Symphony Space for ChoralFest in 2015 and 2017. We also participated in performances of *Antigone in Ferguson*, a play conceived in the wake of Michael Brown's death, with Tamara Tunie and Chris Noth in 2018.



**Nedra Olds-Neal** is a cum laude graduate of Howard University's School of Music and has a Master of Music degree in piano performance from the University of Michigan. This is her thirty-ninth year as director of the Inspirational Choir. An accomplished pianist, she has performed extensively as a recitalist and accompanist. Currently, her talents are focused on singing, conducting and producing choral events. In addition, Nedra was an independent producer for Sony Music's Legacy Recordings label where she was responsible for reissues of classic American music from Mahalia Jackson to Duke Ellington. She has also produced CDs for Arista Records, Motown Records and Sony Wonder.

Nedra is a founding member of Just Friends, a vocal performance group, and she has sung with the New York Choral Artists, formerly the Concert Chorale of New York. As a member of these groups she has sung with major conductors and world renowned orchestral ensembles including: Sir Colin Davis, Gustavo Dudamel, Kurt Mazur, Loren Maazel, Alan Gilbert, Jaap van Zweden, New York Philharmonic Orchestra; Leon Botstein, American Symphony Orchestra; Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, and Mariss Jansons, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam; Franz Welser-Most and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

Nedra received Grammy nominations for her work as a producer on the boxsets entitled *Louis Armstrong: Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, 1923-34*, and *Sony Music 100 Years/Soundtrack For A Century*. In 2002 she was one of the producers for the critically acclaimed boxset *Ken Burns' Jazz - -The Story of American Music* featuring selections from the PBS documentary.

She served as a music consultant for the Slavery In New York Exhibit at the NY Historical Society in 2005-06 and the New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War Exhibit in 2006-07. Nedra conducted the gala and New Year's Eve performances of

Alvin Ailey's iconic ballet, *Revelations with Sweet Honey In The Rock* in December 2010, and has conducted the live music performances of *Revelations* from 2011-2020. Nedra contracted and prepared a multicultural children's choir recording of *When Colors Come Together (Our Island In The Sun)*, based on the title song from the 1957 film *Island In The Sun*, which starred Harry Belafonte. The track, which was released as a single in February 2017 to celebrate the singer/social activist's 90th birthday, is the opening number from the anthology, *The Legacy Of Harry Belafonte*. Nedra participated in a program commemorating the 200th birthday of Frederick Douglass in 2018 at The NY Historical Society with her group, Just Friends. She was invited by the *National Museum of African American Music* to discuss her views on Gospel Music. The interview is included in the museum's permanent exhibition on the history of African American religious music in Nashville, TN. She is a recently retired Professor from Nassau Community College in Long Island.



**Shari Gill** is a native of Brooklyn, NY. Being heavily musical and artistically involved as a child growing up, by age 12, she landed her first real performing job with the touring company Living Arts doing "Porgy & Bess." Between attending high school in Hawaii, and moving back to NY/NJ, she joined various gospel and jazz choirs and groups having the chance to also direct.

She did two tours, one solo, one ensemble, in "Mostly Gospel Festival" in France. Some of her performance credits during that time included singing backup briefly for Tituss Burgess, Macy Gray, and The Dough Boys, and Gloria Gainer, all while completing her Bachelor's in Musical Theatre at New Jersey City University.

Her show credits include "Officer Barrel/Miss Pennywise" in *Urinetown*, "Ronette" in *Little Shop of Horrors*, "Gary Coleman" in *Avenue Q*, "Madame Thenardier (us)" in *Le Miserable*, "BJ" in *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, "Mama Noah" in *Children of Eden*, "Motormouth Maybelle" in *Hairspray*, and "Maria" in *Porgy & Bess* (the musical/concert version), "Dionne" in *Hair*, "Ismene" in *Gospel at Colonus*, "Gladys Bentley" in *If This Be Sin*, "Harriette V. Moore" in *Fearless*, as well as currently soloing and ensemble singing at many venues in the city and recording studio projects.



**Erika Nicole Johnson** is an accomplished soprano and performance advisor whose journey began as a young performer at Dallas' Arts Magnet, Booker T. Washington High School. She went on to serve as a dedicated arts advocate in leadership at Florida A&M University before pursuing her Master of Music and Professional Studies degree at the Manhattan School of Music. Her performances on stages such as Carnegie Hall and the Barclays Center have shown her the profound impact the arts can have on individuals and communities alike.



**Matt King** began his piano studies when he was five, and was playing professionally by age fourteen. He attended the University of Illinois as a classical music major before relocating to the New York area, where he earned his degree in Jazz Studies & Performance from William Paterson University in NJ. A Composition Fellowship recipient from the NJ State Council on the Arts, he has garnered numerous awards for his playing, composing, and arranging. Matt was a Thelonious Monk International Jazz Piano Competition semi-finalist, and the winner of the Great American Jazz Piano Competition in 2000. He has performed with renowned jazz artists Chris Potter, Rufus Reid, Billy Hart, Vic Juris, and

Joe Morello; top Brazilian musicians Nilson Matta and Claudio Roditi; iconic groups such as Blood, Sweat & Tears and The Shirelles; pop vocalists Phoebe Snow and Curtis Stigers; blues legend Earl King; and many other artists across a broad stylistic spectrum.

Matt served as keyboardist and musical director for the distinguished jazz guitarist Chuck Loeb for many years. He has performed with four symphony orchestras in the US, appeared on The Today Show and Good Morning America, and played Holland's renowned North Sea Jazz Festival, the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, the Montreal Jazz Festival, and countless other venues throughout the US and over twenty countries abroad. Currently free-lancing as a pianist, organist, and vocalist in a variety of genres, King also teaches piano and music theory privately. He has served as accompanist for The Riverside Church Inspirational Choir for the past seventeen years.



**Tash Neal** is a world class guitar player, singer, and songwriter based in Harlem, NYC. His sound and vibes are so versatile, he's performed with and is co-signed by iconic acts across all genres of music. From rock idols Lenny Kravitz, Slash, Gary Clark Jr., The Black Crowes, Tedeschi Trucks Band, and Billy Idol to jam band favorites Soulive, Dumpstaphunk, Lettuce, George Porter Jr., Jaimoe, Gov't Mule, and Robert Randolph to hip hop heavyweights Kanye West, Jim Jones, Mos Def, Ski Beatz, Daru Jones and Damon Dash, to country talents Shooter Jennings, Sturgill Simpson and Zac Brown Band, to electronic acts Griz and DJ Wordy, to classic rock legends The Who, Phil Lesh, Bob Weir, John Kay from Steppenwolf, and Roger McGuinn from The Byrds.

Formerly one half of rock duo The London Souls, Tash released his first solo effort *Charge It To The Game* in 2021 featuring two songs produced by The Black Keys' Dan Auerbach. He was recently a part of the "Preacher Kids" album by Robert Randolph, that just won the Grammy for 2026 best contemporary blues album.

Tash's infectious rhythms always get audiences on their feet. Tom Teicholz of Forbes magazine called him, "a guitar wizard" and exclaimed "I would see him anytime, such great energy and great guitar playing," and Drew Barrymore, who featured his latest album as recommended listening on her daytime show, called him, "Just fantastic".



**Jonathon Peretz** is from Ann Arbor, Michigan. He studied music at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan while studying privately with Detroit drummers, Jimmy Allen and Gene Stewart. Jonathon has performed with a Who's Who of jazz musicians. In 1980 he began these relationships with Larry Nozero at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland. He went on to work with jazz vocalist, Jean Carne, trumpeter, Freddie Hubbard and pianist, Bob James. In 1984 he toured with the late trumpet icon Maynard Ferguson. After moving to New York City he worked with vibraphonist, Dave Samuels, and traveled to Japan with vocalist Ben E. King. In 1990 he was the percussionist for the studio band featured in the HBO comedy special, Robert Wuhl's World Tour. In 1992 he toured South America with Latin pop star Emmanuel. In 1994 he joined the legendary rock band Blood, Sweat and Tears with vocalist David Clayton Thomas and traveled through the USA, Middle East and Europe. Jonathon began touring with Latin pop star Ricky Martin in 1996 and traveled South America, and Europe playing to sold out crowds and making several television appearances. Currently Jonathon resides in New Jersey where he does studio work and continues to freelance. He is a member of The Riverside Church.



**Mark Peterson** plays bass for a diverse roster of artists which includes vocalists Shakira, Little Anthony and the Imperials, saxophonists Tom Scott, Gerald Albright and guitarist James Blood Ulmer. He is the musical director for the Cirque show, Michael Jackson Legacy. He is currently composing music for a docu-series on ecological awareness, sponsored by the University of Amherst and the U.S. Navy. He has worked with guitarist Vernon Reid on several feature films which include: *Mr. 3000*, *Through the Lens Darkly*, and *Free Angela and All Political Prisoners*. Mark worked on the music production team for: *When Claude Got Shot*, a documentary exploring the complexity of gun violence and the ripple effect it has on communities. The documentary won the 2022 Emmy for Exceptional Merit in a Documentary.



**Sherrie Pratt**, a native of Cleveland, Ohio, Pratt is a singer and actress who gained acclaim and outstanding recognition in New York City as a featured soloist with the Boys Choir of Harlem. She performed Poulenc's Gloria at Aaron Davis Hall and was a featured soloist on the Ebony Ecumenical Ensemble recording *Love My Children* by Dr. James Forbes.

Embraced by the Mennonite World Conference, Pratt has been a special soloist at conferences in the cities of Strasbourg, Wichita, Edmonton, and Harrisburg, where she performed with the Mennonite Children's Choir of Lancaster. A favorite of the Lancaster Mennonite community for 30 years, her inspiring performances of spirituals and hymns warmed the hearts of many at the 100-year anniversary celebration of the Mennonite Historical Society in 2013. She sang in the Mennonite

Children's Choir of Lancaster Christmas Concert Series in 2011 and in the Celebration of Hope and Healing benefit concert with the MCCL Chamber Choir in 2015. At the People's Place in Intercourse, Pennsylvania, she performed the role of Mary for several seasons in its production of The Nativity.

Pratt studied voice and graduated from Baldwin Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, where she minored in voice and held a dual major in Elementary Education and Science. She earned her Doctorate in Organization and Leadership from Teachers College at Columbia University. Thankful for a loving husband and three gifted young adult sons, Pratt currently resides in Harlem and testifies, "To God be the glory for the things He has done."

## THE INSPIRATIONAL CHOIR

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### SOPRANO

Esther Asibuo  
Gail Blache-Gill  
Barbara Brandon  
Bernadette Chapman  
Nancy Clark  
Joan Knibb+  
Hylida Clarke  
Ramona Dunlap+  
Dorothy Gloster  
Celia King Hazzard+  
Erika Johnson  
Liz Lang  
Lorraine Muir  
Adaiah Ogletree  
Cheryl Rogers  
Allanah Salter+  
Genevieve Stewart  
Sherrie Strange-Pratt  
Sajini Varghese

### ALTO

Adia Allison  
Vanessa Anderson  
Yvonne Blackwell+  
Suzanne Carothers  
Linda Childs  
Patricia Clark  
Eva Cordero  
Kimberle Crenshaw  
Abosede George  
Shari Gill  
Jacqueline Gregg  
Phenisher Harris  
Joy Lau  
Cecile Kirton-Smith  
Mary A. Lorick+  
Lle-Anne P. McKenzie+  
Marilynn Nereo  
Diamond Perkins  
Ayanna Washington

### TENOR

Victoria Clarice Anderson  
Jeremiah Drake  
Andre Ferguson  
Marie Louise Guinier  
Delton Henderson  
Robert Hughes  
Mark Ing  
Juanita Kirton  
Matt Krenz  
Geoffrey Martin+  
Gloria Moy+  
Rev. Freeman Palmer  
Anne H. Pollack+  
Irene Schultz+  
Nancy Steiner

### BASS

Michael Barnes+  
Rafael Candelaria (Ralph)  
Charles Carter  
Brandon Coleman  
John McFadden+  
Nigel Sangster  
Michael Stewart  
Jon Skinner  
Dr. Philip Domenico

+ on leave

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

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Jacob Schmid, *technical director*

Mitch Bleier, *photographer*

## TRIBUTE TO DAVID

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Upon the August 16, 2025 passing of our beloved choir member, David Vaughn, members of The Inspirational Choir found comfort in one another during a time of tremendous loss by sharing their feelings and treasured memories of him.

*From, "I am deeply saddened to lose David," to . . .*

*I have no words.*

*I am shocked!*

*No words, just humming everything he sang.*

*One of his favorite songs was "Great is Thy Faithfulness."*

*Such sad news.*

*My heart broke reading this news.*

*This is devastating news.*

*I am floored by this loss.*

*This hurts.*

*David was one of the first to give me a warm welcome to the Choir.*

*He saw you. He saw the intent and value in one's individual humanity.*

*Words cannot express my feelings.*

*My heart is heavy. My spirit is weak.*

*Hearing his voice say "quiet please" made we feel safe.*

*I take comfort knowing that our dearest brother is now with our Lord and Savior*

*I am still without words and in disbelief.*

I have to tell you that I am still grieving David's passing. I believe it has impacted all of us in ways that are difficult to put into words. He was truly the engine that made this choir the wonderful community it has become over the years. I don't know a single person who ever had a cross word to say about this remarkable man. David was one of the finest people I have ever known, and I can't imagine anyone who knew him feeling otherwise.

I've known him for over 40 years, and throughout all that time, he remained a steady source of wisdom and kindness — someone who always offered sage advice and a helping hand.

We all relied on him for so much: his beautiful tenor voice, his role as Choir Librarian and robe manager, his leadership as chair of countless committees at The Riverside Church, his work with The American Baptist Conference, and even his time as stage manager at the Minskoff Theater — not to mention his involvement in numerous performing ensembles in both New York and Philadelphia.

David's willingness to step up, his deep compassion, and the unwavering thoughtfulness he showed in all things — these were qualities that defined him. They are everything we aspire to in ourselves.

I thank God for placing David in our lives. I know that we are better for having known him. It's hard to imagine what life will be like without him, but I know he would want us to be strong — to continue lifting our voices in song, praising God every time we stand before the congregation.

As we continue our ministry in The Inspirational Choir, we will lift our voices to make beautiful music — music that honors, remembers, and celebrates our beloved David.

For the past nine years, members of The Inspirational Choir have chosen to donate their annual dues to worthy causes. This year, in loving memory of David, the Choir has decided to make its \$500 charitable donation to the Riverside Church Food Pantry, in honor of his life, compassion, and service.

## THE BACKGROUND STORY OF THE INSPIRATIONAL CHOIR'S GIVING

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As we give through song, in 2026, The Riverside Church Inspirational Choir made a decision to give in a different way as well. By forgoing costly huge Receptions at our Annual Concerts which we paid for through our dues, we could replace them with modest ones and use our funds to support worthy causes. And that's what we did. We began to seek out those committed to making the world better than they found it. We felt that supporting efforts which attend to the needs of those who are in need, would be a better use of our funds.

In the nine years since we began our Annual Concert Giving Donation, The Inspirational Choir has made contributions to the following Organizations:

- 2017 Flint Michigan Water Project helping to provide clean water for those without safe drinking water.
- 2018 Crossing Points Arts bringing powerful healing of the arts to survivors of human trafficking.
- 2019 | RAICES responding to the humanitarian crisis at the southern border.
- 2020 | WEDO promoting and protecting women's rights globally.
- 2021 & 2022 | The Riverside Church Ministry of Parish Care Food Pantry feeding the hungry.
- 2023 | Women for Women of Sierra Leon, Flint Michigan Water Project (FMWP), Music on the Inside (MOTI)
- 2024 | Doctors Without Borders, Howard University Music Department, and The Rainbow Heights Club
- 2025 | California Community Foundation

This year we will be contributing to the Riverside Church Food Pantry.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the following people for giving so graciously of their time and talents. The Inspirational Choir, all soloists, instrumentalists and all those who made this concert possible: Paul Byssainthe, Jr., Mitch Bleier, Lorraine Burchall, Suzanne Carothers, Linda Childs, Pat Clark, Dr. Nathaniel Gumbs, Angela Haddock, Joy Lau, Alex Coker and The Riverside B&G and Security staff, the Riverside Technical Services staff. Lie-Anne McKenzie, Sean & Tash Neal, Rev. Freeman Palmer, Gary Morston, Marilyn Nereo, Elza Sharpe, Irene Schultz, Genevieve Stewart, Rev. Adriene Thorne, David J. Vaughn and the Music Committee.

## DISCOUNTED PARKING

Visit the Security Desk on the C-Level to pick up a coupon that has a QR code on it. Bring the coupon with your parking ticket down to the attendant and pay the \$5 fee.

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## THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH MUSIC STAFF

**Nathaniel Gumbs**  
*Director of Music and Organist*

**Paul Byssainthe, Jr.**  
*Associate Organist*

**Stephen Tharp**  
*Artist in Residence*

**Nedra Olds Neal**  
*Director, Riverside Inspirational Choir*

**Daniel Potter**  
*Director, Riverside Ringers*

**Matthew Hommez**  
*Director, Riverside Rising Voices and Riverside Youth Choir*

**Kristina Giles**  
*Director, Riverside Community String Ensemble*

**Lynli Wang**  
*Carillonneur*

**Peter Batchelder**  
*Curator of Organs*

**Douglass Hunt**  
*Curator of Organs*

**Angela Haddock**  
*Administrative Assistant*



**THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH**  
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The Riverside Church is a member of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and the United Church of Christ and cooperates with the Council of Churches in the City of New York, and with the New York State, National and World Council of Churches.