

Blind Boys of Alabama on a mission to spread some musical good news

Grammy winning group comes to the Egyptian



Cameron Witting

The Grammy Award-winning Blind Boys of Alabama — from left: Ricky McKinnie, Paul Beasley, Jimmy Carter, Ben Moore and Joey William — will bring their uplifting gospel music to the Egyptian Theatre this week.

Grammy winners Blind Boys of Alabama haven't changed their mission since the group started singing as kids at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Blind in the late 1930s.

"We try to bring encouragement and hope to the hopeless," said the group's leader and founding member Jimmy Carter. "We have a message. Wherever there is life, there is hope. And where there is hope, there is a chance."

The Blind Boys of Alabama will bring its uplifting singing to Park City for four nights starting Thursday, April 6, at the Egyptian Theatre.

"We look forward to coming and four nights is great, because that will give me a time to rest all day," Carter said with a laugh.

The concerts will show the Blind Boys doing what they do best: preserving and performing gospel music.

"That's all we do," Carter said. "We sing mostly traditional gospel, but you will also hear a few contemporary songs, as well."

Carter said he has learned how important the genre of music is to his audiences.

"I have found out that we have touched many lives," he said. "We have sung to people who have planned suicide. And after they heard us, they came up to us and told us that they could hang on a little longer. And that is one of those rewards that I cherish."

That is only one of the rewarding aspects of the career Carter hopes will continue for a few more years.

"When people ask me what keeps me going, I always tell them the I love what I do," Carter said. "If you love what you do, you keep motivated. You always want to do more and more and more. So, as long as I can get the response we do from the audiences, I know I will give 110 percent of my energy."

Carter's life isn't one with out challenges. He said. through God, he came to terms with his talent and circumstance.

"My parents were the parents of six boys, and all of them could see, except me," he said. "I questioned God about that, you know? Then as time went on, I came to realize that if I had been able to see, I doubt very seriously that I would be doing what I'm doing now."

"So, I'm speaking only for myself when I say that I was born to sing. I believe this is my calling from God. He saw that and decided not to give me my sight, so, I can do this — work for him."

The Grammy Awards and nominations were other signs that told Carter the group was doing the right thing.

"When the Blind Boys started out, we didn't think about any kind of accolade at all," he said. "We just wanted to sing gospel music. But as time went on and we got our first Grammy in 2002 (for Best Traditional Gospel Album), that was a great moment for all of us."

The win started a landslide of Best Traditional Gospel Album Grammys the group won in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2009. The group won a Lifetime Achievement Award Grammy in 2009 as well.

This year, the Blind Boys of Alabama were nominated for the Best Roots American Roots Performance for the album "Mother's Children Have a Hard Time," but lost to Sarah Jarosz's "House of Mercy."

"I'm pretty sure we'll be in it again," Carter said with a laugh.

The singer said the only real challenge that faces the Blind Boys of Alabama is "staying in the race."

"We are getting ready to do another project and that always has the potential to lead us to the next step," he said. "I don't know what that next step might be, but whatever it is, we'll be ready for it."

The reason for believing the troupe has more to accomplish is because Carter knows gospel music will continue throughout the ages.

"Gospel is the good news of God and God is forever," he said. "Sometimes we all get smacked back and we always rise back up to the surface."

"Although my voice is getting used up a lot, and the vocal chords are getting old, they still have some fire left," Carter said with another laugh. "Once I get warmed up, they do OK."

Before hanging up, Carter wanted to add one more thing.

"I would love to tell the people of Utah that the Blind Boys of Alabama are on our way," he said. "And when we leave after our concerts, Utah will never be the same."

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