

IN LOVE WITH THE MUSIC

GREAT AUDIENCES HELP TO MAKE A GREAT ORCHESTRA.
VIVIAN FOX IS IN THE AUDIENCE, IN THE AISLES AS AN USHER,
AND ON STAGE WITH THE IN UNISON CHORUS

BY RAPHAEL MAURICE



Vivian Fox

Vivian Fox's relationship with the St. Louis Symphony and Powell Hall goes back to her teenage years, when she took to the place and its music right away. "My high school music teacher introduced me to the Symphony," Fox recalls, "and I immediately fell in love with the music and have been attending concerts ever since. I joined the IN UNISON Chorus in 1999, which has afforded me the opportunity to sing with the wonderful orchestra."

Fox not only has ties to the Symphony as a vocalist and an audience member, but as an usher as well. She's heard many concerts, but one that comes to mind most fondly was "New Year's Eve, 2010, when the Symphony played the score for *City Lights* with Charlie Chaplin while showing the movie. It brought back memories of going to the movies at Powell when it was the St. Louis Theatre."

Fox is one of many voices that make up the sounds of the St. Louis Symphony IN UNISON Chorus, a group of 120 auditioned volunteers that perform a variety of music highlighting African and African American culture and song. The St. Louis Symphony and IN UNISON Chorus will perform the annual Black

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St. Louis Symphony IN UNISON Chorus

DILIP VISHWANAT

History Month concert on Friday, February 12 at 7:30 p.m., an evening that Fox describes as a time of “remembering, recognizing, and celebrating the achievements of black Americans in U.S. and world history.”

Fox recalls the beginnings of the IN UNISON Chorus. “The Chorus was created in 1994 as a one-time effort for the performance of Hannibal Peterson’s *African Portraits*,” she explains. “Due to an overwhelming positive response the Chorus has become a permanent part of the Symphony family.” Since that initial concert, IN UNISON has continued to delight concertgoers with its deep and soulful renditions of songs, accompanied by the St. Louis Symphony. The Chorus performs with the Symphony for the annual Black History Month Celebration, Gospel Christmas concert, and at various venues in the community. Fox is also involved with the Chorus’s administrative side: “I am a member of the advisory committee. This committee serves as the liaison between the chorus and the Symphony staff,” she explains. She also works hard to fill Powell Hall for each Gospel Christmas and Black History Month concert, selling tickets to large groups as an IN UNISON Church coordinator.

Fox has seen many artists pass through the IN UNISON Chorus. One of whom she is most proud is the composer Rollo Dilworth, who was also a student of Robert Ray, the founder of the IN UNISON Chorus, and its only conductor until his retirement, after 15 years, in 2010. Dilworth is not only a rising star as a composer but a professor of music at Temple University. “Personally I enjoy performing pieces by local composers such as Rollo Dilworth,” says Fox. “I met him when he was still in high school and he was the church musician and now we are singing his compositions. This makes me happy to watch a young person become an adult. You can say I knew them when.” Dilworth’s songs are inspired by

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gospel and soul. Fox's particular favorites include "Climbin' Up the Mountain," along with "Jeremiah's Fire," two signature songs that reveal Dilworth's musical brilliance and power.

As a Powell Hall insider, Fox has some stories to tell. She shares one that doesn't reflect badly on anyone. "There was a patron who arrived late for a concert who was extremely upset," Fox recalls. "She said she was late due to heavy traffic because of the Patti LaBelle concert that was taking place at the Fox. She said she was going to call Patti LaBelle and give her a piece of her mind." Fortunately, Vivian Fox diffused the woman's anger. No call to LaBelle was made and Fox graciously escorted the patron to her seat.

Kevin McBeth, Director of the IN UNISON Chorus, sheds some light on other aspects of Fox and her contributions to the chorus and St. Louis Symphony: "Vivian was one of the first people that I met five years ago. She's quite an interesting lady—a wealth of musical knowledge and a great music lover. She attends many of the Symphony concerts—even the ones she's not involved with. She's quite a musical force in the community. Vivian has been connected with the chorus for a while. She's one of those people that others are drawn to. With her role in the advisory committee, she helps keep us all connected. She's aware of the history of the orchestra, and is an influential voice."

Indeed, Fox does not tend to talk too much about how her presence with IN UNISON and the St. Louis Symphony are integral and important. She goes humbly about her many roles, preferring to see what would help others rather than herself. McBeth continues: "Vivian is one of the most-traveled people. I give her a hard time and tell her how jealous I am. She's gone with us to Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and she's internationally traveled. She's one of those

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—KEVIN MCBETH

people who really enjoys life and adventure. The best footnote of all is that Vivian is understated; always thinking about what benefits the group. We're all a part of the Symphony family."

In the summer Fox plans on traveling to Italy, "a bucket-list" trip to see the splendors of Rome and other destinations. No doubt she will light her way—and the ways of others—throughout another land where music reigns.

Raphael Maurice is a poet, writer, and musician.