

Biography

LIFE AND TIMES: Memphis, the undisputed home of Blues, Rock & Roll, and Gospel, has long helped the world move to different grooves. It is also the city that helped nurture the imaginative soul of classically trained **Bass-Baritone, Jonathan Ashley Blanchard**. Born in November of 1976, *Blanchard's* talent came to maturity while immersed in Memphis's often raucous, inspirational, yet always divergent styles of music and art.

COMMENT: Possessing a voice comparable in depth and richness to the great Paul Robeson, *Blanchard*—in the spiritual tradition of an ancient African Griot—creates music that allows his deep, soulfully rich voice to blend naturally with his compelling dramatic instinct. He movingly conveys the poignant words and melodies of the Negro Spiritual in a manner that defies easy pigeon holding, and his unique style—“reminiscent of Al Jarreau, Bobby McFerrin, and Paul Robeson simultaneously”—offers great variety at any musical venue. No one should miss him deftly rifting through Jazz licks, while he masterfully imitates the sounds emanating from a Jazz Band's instrumental section. His modernized and approachable style of singing creates such an uplifting song that it holds the enthusiasts of Popular, Classical, and Religious Song in sway.

Blanchard's artistic tastes were first forged in grade school. However, by the time he entered high school his artistic curiosity had led him to sing in various choruses, and to act in a number of community theatre productions. While achieving the *Bachelors of Science* in Commercial Music and the *Master of Science* in Music Education Degrees from Tennessee State University, he learned to weave the various elements of his artistic nature into its magnetic style of delivery. His artistry transcends Jazz Bistro & Concert Hall venues, and his stage credits include roles as diverse as *The Priest* in “Your Arms Too Short to Box with God”, *Bernardo* in “A Westside Story”, *Simeon and Potifer* in “Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat”, *Cesar* in “Scipio”, the *Ex-Slave* in “Do Lord Remember Me”, and *The Lion* in “The Wiz”. Drawn also to film, he has appeared as an extra in several movie block-busters, done voice-over work for local and national concerns, appeared on Memphis' WREG – Live At 9 program, and most recently been the featured singing artist on the PBS film “Underground Railroad – Quilt Code”; for Georgia Public Broadcast. *Blanchard* has also presented concerts, master classes, and demonstrations where his musical insights have captivated the imaginations of grade school, high school, and college students alike. This February, in conjunction with Opera Memphis's Educational Outreach Program—*Black Roots in Opera*, *Blanchard* toured throughout Tennessee's major metropolitan areas to help celebrate the **Life & Artistry of Paul Robeson**.

The *Bass-Baritone* has been engaged to appear at such venues as the: *Alpha Kappa Alpha National Convention*; *The Isaac Hayes Restaurant* at the Peabody; *The Southern Union Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist Churches*; *The National Baptist Convention*; and *The Annual Georgia Sea Islands Art Festivals*. His operatic credits include affiliations with Capital City Opera; Atlanta Opera; The Walker Academy of Instrumental & Vocal Excellence; and The Atlanta Lyric Opera. In the fall of 2007 the *Oglethorpe College/AmeriColor Opera Alliance Guild* will present him in the title role of “**Solomon**”; a work written especially for him by critically acclaimed composer Sharon Willis.

Recognizing him as an outstanding talent, *Bill Cruthirds* of the Old Towne Preservation and Development Association deemed that, “**Jonathan's caliber of talent comes along rarely . . . once in every generation**”, and *Rev. Robert Matthews*, Director of the National Baptist Convention Choir found that when *Blanchard* appeared before his congregation, “**The audience was in awe as Jonathan ministered to them**”. The Spring of 2005 saw the release of the *Blanchard's* debut CD, “**And the Spirit Moved**”, which garnered favorable review upon the “Black Gospel Blog” that stated, “**Jonathan Blanchard is an exceptionally gifted basso . . . who . . . articulates . . . spirituals with great purity of vocal tone and [a] careful sense of dialect . . . [that] proves that spirituals can be modernized and not lose their impact.**” In the fall of 2006 he lent his talents to the “**Jazz for Justice CD**”; a compilation of Jazz performances for The World Grotto organization to benefit Amnesty International's efforts for the UgandaCAN (*Uganda Conflict Action Network*) and NUGEN (*Northern Uganda Girls' Education Network*) charities.

Jonathan Blanchard delivers performances that are spiritually enveloped in the traditions of ancient Africans and early African-Americans. His singing “**skillfully guides audiences through Sacred, Gospel, Jazz, R&B,**

and Blues stylizations of the Negro Spiritual". A singer who has shared his talents with many diverse audiences, his appearances have been hailed as a "**beautiful fusion of Negro Spirituals and Jazz**" through "**moving and soulful renditions that speak to every heart.**" So come let your own souls be witness to powerful interpretations of the Negro Spiritual, and experience the vocal artistry of *Jonathan Blanchard* for yourselves. You'll be glad you did!

Press Release

Experience for yourself the exceptional talents of bass-baritone, Jonathan Blanchard! Through the deep, soulfully rich vocals of this captivating young singer the message, history, and profound artistry of the Negro Spiritual continues to enjoy an artistic place in the sun. Through his performances, as he strives to be spiritually enveloped in the tradition of ancient African griots, Jonathan Blanchard's uplifting song skillfully guides audiences through sacred, gospel, jazz, R&B, and blues stylizations of this revered music". A singer who has sung before many diverse audiences, his concerts have been hailed as a "Beautiful fusion of Negro spirituals and jazz".

Through "moving and soulful renditions that speak to every heart", Mr. Blanchard performs Jerome Kern's immortal "Ol Man River" along with traditional renditions of Spiritual selections like "Deep River", and "Hold on". His musical sets may include his stylizing of well known Jazz arrangements of favorites like, "Wade in the Water" and "Swing Lo Sweet Chariot" easily standing beside his own arrangements of "Been in the Storm So Long", and "Go Down Moses". Mr. Blanchard's style which critics have deemed to be reminiscent of Al Jarreau, Bobby McFerrin, and Paul Robeson, offers even greater variety of expression when he masterfully manipulates his voice to imitate the sounds of the instrumental section as it riffs through its jazz licks. Come let your own souls give witness to the interpretative powers and unique vocal artistry of Jonathan Blanchard, and let the sensitivity of his soul lead you through your rediscovery of the Negro Spiritual. You'll be glad you did!!!!

QUOTES

Mr. Blanchard performed for a standing room only audience made up of families with a predominance of teens. His voice and majestic presence impressed all regardless of age. He moved the audience with his interpretation of gospel, blues, jazz and R&B, giving us a true sense of the history and beauty of these musical genres. It also showcased Mr. Blanchard's capability and versatility, excelling in all styles. The audience as well as the presenting coordinators for the event were very complimentary of his work and immediately requested his return for the next year's festivities.

Clarrissa Lega
Artistry

Mr. Blanchard adds a new and refreshing sound to gospel.

Linda Hall
Minority Affairs Coordinator
University of Memphis

QUOTES (continued)

“Having witnessed Jonathan Blanchard’s performance at the last two Annual Georgia Sea Islands Festivals, I can state with enthusiasm and joy that he is an extraordinary talent. Jonathan’s voice has the timber of Paul Robeson and the spirit of his ancestors. The audience was in awe and grateful for this universal talent. I await the world to meet and to hear our African American treasure.”

Dee c. Lubell

Project & Events Director

St. Simons Sea Island Festival

The sound of his striking voice commands attention immediately. He continues to mesmerize his audiences, at churches, operas, plays, and banquets.

Lois Deberry

Speaker Pro-Tempore

State Representative

State of Tennessee

The impact of what Jonathan Blanchard has shared with the Mid-South this year has planted many seeds in the minds of our children that hopefully will flower into a new generation of artists and arts appreciators.

Gary Rowe-State Representative

State of Tennessee



Jonathan Blanchard
BASS VOCALIST

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