

# African Americans and the Arts

African American art is infused with African, Caribbean, and the Black American experiences. In the fields of visual and performing arts, film, literature, fashion, folklore, language, music, architecture, culinary and other forms of cultural expression, the African American influence has been paramount. African American artists have used art to preserve history as well as for empowerment. Artistic and cultural movements have been led by people of African descent and set the standard for popular trends around the world.

We can see the unbroken chain of Black art production from antiquity to the present, from Egypt across Africa, from Europe to the New World. Prior to the American Revolution, enslaved Africans began their more than 300-year tradition of making sweetgrass baskets, revealing their visual artistry via craft.

The suffering of those in bondage gave birth to the spirituals, the nation's first contribution to music. Blues musicians such as Robert Johnson, McKinley 'Muddy Waters' Morganfield and Riley "BB" King created and nurtured a style of music that became the bedrock for gospel, soul, and other popular forms of music.

Black contributions to literature include works by poets like Phillis Wheatley, essays, autobiographies, and novels by writers such as David Walker and Maria Stewart.

In the 1960s, the cultural evolution known as the Black Arts Movement saw artists cover issues such as pride in one's heritage and establish art galleries and museum exhibitions to show their work. This period brought us artists such as Alvin Ailey, Judith Jamison, Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez.

In 1973, New York Black musicians started a new genre of music called hip-hop, which comprises five foundational elements (DJing, MCing, graffiti, break dancing and beat boxing). Hip-hop performers also used technological equipment such as turntables, synthesizers, drum machines, and samplers to make their songs. Since then, hip-hop has continued to be a pivotal force in political, social, and cultural spaces and was a medium where issues such as racial violence in the inner city, sexism, economic disinvestment and others took the forefront.

In celebrating the entire history of African Americans and the arts, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) puts into the national spotlight the richness of the past and present with an eye towards what the rest of the twenty-first century will bring. ASALH dedicates its 98th Annual Black History Month Theme to African Americans and the arts.

*- Adapted from ASALH ([www.asalh.org](http://www.asalh.org))*



**FEBRUARY 29, 2024**  
**6:30 P.M.**

**RUSH-HENRIETTA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**  
**1799 LEHIGH STATION ROAD, HENRIETTA**

*Please join us after the performances for refreshments in the cafeteria.*

# PROGRAM

Drum Call .....	Womba Group
Welcome.....	Mr. Arkee Allen, Principal, Rush-Henrietta Senior High School
“Lift Every Voice and Sing” by James Weldon Johnson.....	Audience Participation
The Roots .....	Womba Group
Living the Legacy .....	Dr. Barbara Mullen, Superintendent
Keeping the Faith .....	rSpirit Unity Choir
Passing on the History through Storytelling.....	Ms. Almeta Whitis
“Catch the Fire” by Sonia Sanchez .....	Nia Breedlove
“Suit and Tie” .....	written & performed by Lauren Noble & Anatasha Majors
“Sisters/How Many Years?” .....	written & performed by Faith & Sephora Doumnandé featuring Zyon Johnson
“The Creatures of Prometheus” Allegretto by Ludwig van Beethoven	Emmanuel Nyibule, TJ Jones, Caira Johnson, Olivia Ezra, Kayden Carter, Eleanor Hentschel
“Our World” .....	written & performed by Kidest Misganaw
“Endless No More” by Elmiene .....	Iyanna Jones & Sephora Doumnandé
Passing on the Arts: Original Songs & Poetry .....	RISSA
Full Circle: Performing Original Songs .....	Tyrone Rudolph
Closing Remarks.....	Nerlande Anselme, Assistant Superintendent

Directed by Reenah Golden, The Avenue Blackbox Theatre

Emcees for the evening, Zyon Johnson and Ethan Dengler

Rush-Henrietta Central School District gratefully acknowledges the time and talents of all those involved with putting together tonight’s presentations and performances.

# “Lift Every Voice and Sing”

By James Weldon Johnson

Lift every voice and sing  
Till earth and Heaven ring  
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;  
Let our rejoicing rise,  
High as the list'ning skies,  
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea  
Sing a song full of faith that the  
dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope  
that the present has brought us;  
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,  
Bitter the chast'ning rod,  
Felt in the day that hope  
Unborn had died;  
Yet with a steady beat,  
Have not our weary feet,  
Come to the place on which our fathers sighed?  
We have come over a way  
that with tears has been watered,  
We have come, treading our path  
through the blood of the slaughtered,  
Out from the gloomy past,  
till now we stand at last  
Where the white gleam of our star is cast.

God of our weary years,  
God of our silent tears,  
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;  
Thou who has by Thy might,  
Led us into the light,  
Keep us forever in the path, we pray  
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God,  
where we met Thee,  
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the  
world,  
We forget Thee,  
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,  
May we forever stand,  
True to our God,  
True to our native land.

Often referred to as "The Black National Anthem," *Lift Every Voice and Sing* was a hymn written as a poem by NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson in 1900. His brother, John Rosamond Johnson, composed the music for the lyrics. A choir of 500 schoolchildren at the segregated Stanton School, where James Weldon Johnson was principal, first performed the song in public in Jacksonville, Florida to celebrate President Abraham Lincoln's birthday.

At the turn of the 20th century, Johnson's lyrics eloquently captured the solemn yet hopeful appeal for the liberty of Black Americans. Set against the religious invocation of God and the promise of freedom, the song was later adopted by NAACP and prominently used as a rallying cry during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

(Courtesy of the NAACP)

