



Luisa & Joe Parisi
Editor and Publishing Team
Established in 2004

05-21-07

Duke Ellington School of the Arts Show Choir visits Mount Vernon High School

By Deena Parham

The internationally acclaimed Duke Ellington School of the Arts Show Choir of Washington, D.C., visited Mount Vernon High School auditorium, on May 18. The performance was a part of the Triple Hill Music Festival, a project of the Westchester Arts Council. Kelly Jackson of the Arts Council, introduced the program, and said, "We are happy and thrilled to have the Duke Ellington Show Choir here."

The Festival's Creative Director, Donna Jackson, an alumna of MVHS, briefly reminisced of her days at the school. Jackson, whose love of music was cultivated both at home, and in the school's Music Department, told the student body, "I encourage you to follow your dreams and goals. It is not impossible for you to bring a music festival to your hometown."

The Show Choir, which has shared the stage with legends from Nancy Wilson to Stevie Wonder, had 25 members who performed a broad repertoire of songs, from classical to Motown revue. Samuel Bonds, the choir's program director, led the students as they presented a 90-minute show of exciting music and dance, before a capacity crowd.

Bonds said that the Show Choir performs internationally, and for many of its Washington, D.C. neighbors who include, the President, ambassadors, and government officials. Ellington's 500 students have a rigorous curriculum of pre-professional arts training, and academics. The highly-rated, public high school instructs students in grades nine to twelve. Admission is by audition only.

Ellington students started the show, with a rendition of "Dancing in the Streets." Several ensemble students beckoned for members of the audience to join them onstage to dance, causing the crowd to cheer. Show Choir members performed well-known hits such as "Proud Mary," and "Stop in the Name of Love." To the delight of the MVHS audience, Ellington students, dressed in elegant costumes, paid tribute to a variety of legends, such as Tina and Ike Turner, Stevie Wonder, and Diana Ross.

The assembly concluded with a classical soul revue, a range of songs from spirituals to Whitney Houston. It was an elegant display of exceptional talent and showmanship, which consistently garners the school well-deserved accolades.

Waveline Bennett-Conroy, an Assistant Principal at MVHS, was pleased to see the Show Choir at MVHS. She stated, "The kids were in awe. They participated, and had fun. All year they have wanted to have a guest performer. It's great that they are exposed to other music, such as jazz, and music from the 1960's."

Sheila Baptista, President of Lewis and Kirk Music, and a Mount Vernon resident, is an alumna of Ellington High School. Jackson credited Baptista for suggesting and bringing the choir to the city.



(l to r) Sheila Baptista, Kelly Jackson, Samuel Bonds, Donna Jackson, Waveline Bennett-Conroy.



Students perform as Diana Ross and the Supremes



Duke Ellington Show Choir



Duke Ellington Show Choir's classical soul revue