



The Legendary Ingramettes
Artist Information Sheet
All Ages

Artist Biography:

The Legendary Ingramettes

The story of the Legendary Ingramettes began over 60 years ago, connected by generations of powerful women tied together through song and strength. The group was formed by the late “Mama” Maggie Ingram, born in 1930 on what was still called Mulholland’s Plantation in Coffee County, Georgia where she worked the cotton and tobacco fields with her parents. Maggie began playing the piano and singing at an early age and developed a great love for gospel music in her community’s church. Finding herself a single mother in 1961, Maggie and her five young children moved to Richmond where she found work in the home of Oliver Hill, an important Civil Rights lawyer who fought for the equality of African Americans to attend the same schools as white students.

Maggie’s family began singing together in their church and soon formed their gospel group, “Maggie Ingram and the Ingramettes” which became one of the most beloved groups in Richmond’s famous gospel tradition. In fact, the Grammy Award winning artist D’Angelo is the son of a Richmond minister. He used to watch Maggie Ingram and the Ingramettes perform when he was a child and considers them to be one of his most inspiring influences. In addition to getting record contracts with important gospel labels and performing up and down the East Coast, the Ingramettes performed regularly in churches throughout the city. Inspired by the work of Hill and other important civil rights activists the family met during her employment with him, Maggie maintained a very service-driven mission for the group, including starting a ministry in prisons and with programs that reunited women inmates with their children and families.

Maggie passed away in 2015, but the group has continued to soar as “The Legendary Ingramettes” with Maggie’s oldest daughter, Almeta Ingram-Miller taking the lead of this family band.

Tradition:

Black Gospel

Africa has always been a continent rich with diverse cultural traditions and musical styles. The slave trade in the U.S. and Caribbean tore many Africans from their families and homes, forcing them across the dangerous waters of the Atlantic. Despite these tragic circumstances, enslaved Africans were able to hold on to many important parts of their musical and cultural traditions. These traditions included drumming, dancing and spiritual songs passed down through the generations. In America, these cultural traditions changed over time to include Christian spiritual stories and ideas. Although the gathering of enslaved peoples was rarely allowed, coming together for Christian worship was often accepted. There, against the cruelty of slavery, communities were created, ideas shared,



spirits were lifted, and the style of Black Gospel music was born. Gospel also came from a style of singing called Spirituals. Spirituals are often sung in a “call and response” style, meaning that a verse is first sung by a leader and then repeated or answered by a larger group of singers.

When many Black communities migrated from the rural areas of the South to cities in the 1900’s, they carried their religious culture with them. In cities like Chicago, Black gospel music developed alongside other musical styles such as ragtime, blues, and jazz. Today, Black Gospel music takes many forms—from small group singing to large choirs. The energy and rhythm of the music is heard not only within churches, but in concert halls, in styles like R&B, Hip-hop, and other popular music.

Place:

Richmond, Virginia

Richmond is the capital of Virginia and sits right along the James River. Because of its location on this river, which was an important route for trade, Richmond has always held great importance. Originally the capital of the Powhatan Indian Tribe, it later became the capital of the Confederacy during the Civil War. After the Civil War, Black Richmond citizens built a successful business and arts community which today remains a cultural center and remains a city with a majority African American population.

The Civil Rights movement in the city helped ensure the rights for African Americans nationwide. This movement, which extended from the 50s-70s, still has reverberations today.

Civil rights attorney and activist Henry Marsh recalls of the Civil Rights fight in Richmond, “We had to rise to the occasion. We had the strongest group of civil rights and NAACP fighters ... in the union because that's where they chose to make a stand.” Gospel music was the resounding soundtrack of this vibrant Civil Rights movement in Richmond, and the Legendary Ingramettes were widely celebrated as the city’s “First Family of Gospel.” The history of the Ingramettes echoes these fights for justice and their story of courage and faith intersects this movement many times throughout the group's history.