ARTS

"I have a dream"
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

Black sacred music choir formed this year aims to preserve heritage

BY REGINA JONES AND LAURENTIA WOO
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER AND STAFF REPORTER



REGINA JONES / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
The Yale Jubilee Chorale, which is open to both undergraduate and graduate students, is led by Jeffrey Allen Murdock, a new professor in the Yale Institute of Sacred Music who was hired to create the choir.

The Yale Jubilee Chorale, a new 24-person ensemble formed this year in collaboration with the Institute of Sacred Music's Interdisciplinary Program and the Black Church at the Yale Divinity School, has begun its first rehearsals.

The choir, nicknamed "Jubilee," was formed to share and preserve the heritage of Black sacred music. The choir is led by Jeffrey Allen Murdock, professor and associate director of the Interdisciplinary Program in Music and the Black Church. Murdock was brought to Yale to form and conduct the choir, which had its first rehearsal on Sept. 17, a few weeks after auditions were held.

"Yale Divinity School and Institute of Sacred Music decided to put together an ensemble that was faculty-led in which students can come together and sing the same music," Murdock said. "This is the choral answer to that ensemble, just to ensure that we can do that kind of music, and do it at a high level, adhering to the performance practice."

Entrance into the choir required an audition and an interview, used to evaluate a singer's technique and connection to the tradition of gospel and spiritual music. Members are compensated for their time during rehearsals and performances — the choir is one of the few that do so at Yale.

"I jumped at the opportunity to be part of a choir that sings Black sacred music," Leif Steele '28, a member of the choir, said. "Gospel music is, in my opinion, one of the most rigorous styles of music, so it's also very helpful in terms of sight reading and my technical abilities. They're getting much better in this choir."

In the rehearsal room, Murdock conducts the choir from behind the grand piano. Even when he is working with one section of the choir, each member is attentive to and immersed in the music.

"I've really enjoyed getting to learn new music, and though we move at a pretty fast pace, it's a fun challenge," AnaSofia Rice '29 said. "It's an honor to work with Dr. Murdock, and I look forward to our continued work through the next few months."

Students in the chorale, both from Yale College and the graduate schools, said they have found the group to be a welcoming community.

Murdock said he hopes the Yale Jubilee Chorale will spearhead education and community engagement initiatives. The choir will mainly perform at services led by students at the Divinity School open to the public.

"For some people, it's an outlet because, 'I need to be able to worship.' For other students, it is, 'I get to experience my blackness, my roots,'" Murdock said. "At other spaces that I've been in, students who are able to participate in an ensemble like this have told me I would have dropped out of school if it wasn't for this, or I would have made some different life choices."

Murdock was named the 2021 GRAMMY Music Educator of the Year Award and awarded the 2016 Connor Endowed Faculty Fellowship in the J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences.

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Latino Yalies explore culture and identity at La Casa poetry night

BY ALVIN LEE
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Dozens of Yale students attended "Poetry and Identity Night" on Tuesday at the La Casa Cultural Center de Julia de Burgos.

The event was hosted by the center's affiliate student organizations, ¡Oye! Spoken Word and De Colores, an affinity group for queer Latino students, as part of a monthlong programming series celebrating Latine Heritage Month. The center derives its full name from Puerto Rican poet Julia de Burgos, according to the Yale website. In her poetry, de Burgos reflects on her identity as an Afro-Latina woman through themes of feminism, social justice and colonialism.

Emily Singh '28, the president of ¡Oye! Spoken Word, said she hoped the poetry event would foster a space where participants feel comfortable sharing about their identities and cultures.

"¡Oye! has a catchphrase growing nowadays, 'poetry of people,' and we believe spoken word is a very powerful way to connect people of all cultures and of all backgrounds," she said in an interview prior to the event.

Olutola Britto '28 said La Casa and ¡Oye! share a common mission.

"La Casa means my home, right? And I do feel like every time I go to La Casa, I feel at home," Britto said in a phone interview after the event. "¡Oye! is proud and happy to be part of La Casa, and I think the same for La Casa, because we are both pushing each other to be better for students. Not just for Latinos, but for every student."

At the event, Singh prompted participants to write poetry as a group. Participants wrote verses reflecting on their identity and cultural background, then took turns sharing out loud and remarking on parts of writing that they found most impactful.

Some students brought poetry they previously wrote to the event.

Blessed Makahamadze '29 shared "Everything and Nothing," a poem reflecting on his changing relationship with self-identity by comparing himself to an imagined superhero representing his ideal self.

"And everything I'm not is crucial to defining what I am," Makahamadze recited to the crowd. "And I never will be perfect. If I was, I wouldn't be me."

The audience answered with snaps and applause.

Makahamadze said he hoped his poem would act as a reminder that our imperfections are what makes us who we are.

"I think oftentimes we try to push our flaws to the side. We try to perfect ourselves. I think everything you are not plays such a valuable role in defining who you are," he said in an interview after the event.

Makahamadze said the act of sharing poetry itself helps him grapple with his identity.

"Listening to other poets from ¡Oye! has, first of all, helped me realize that I'm not alone in a lot of things I'm feeling, but it's also helped me learn a lot more about myself," Makahamadze said. "Poetry is a deeply vulnerable exercise, and ¡Oye! really just allows you to share yourself."

La Casa was founded in 1977.

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KAILYN HUYNH / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
As part of a monthlong series of events in celebration of Latine Heritage Month, student organizations ¡Oye! and De Colores hosted a night of creating and reading poetry to reflect on Latine culture.