

Celebrating African-American Culture through Opera

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The arts play a vital role in celebrating and educating people about African-American history. This year, the Metropolitan Museum of Art is hosting an exhibit, *Provocative Visions: Race and Identity*. The University of Denver's Lamont Symphony Orchestra will participate in the program, *Dream*, celebrating the life of Martin Luther King Jr., including a performance by singer Denyse Graves. Additionally, this year's tribute to African-American history is deeper due to the election of the first African-American president. 2008 was a pivotal moment in the history of not only our country, but Black culture.

Being an inclusive art form, opera remains vested in exemplifying the history of African-Americans. Some companies set out to produce large-scale works for this purpose. For example, [Cincinnati Opera's](#) *Oh Freedom!* is a musical tribute to African-American history. Cincinnati Opera Education Director Charmaine Moore says, "These 45-minute 'informances' take the audience through the African-American struggle for freedom from the era of slavery through the Civil Rights Movement." In addition to school performances, nine performances will be offered throughout the month of February, and each is 45 minutes in length and free to audiences.

These productions also move beyond companies' mainstages. [Des Moines Metro Opera's](#) educational touring troupe, [OPERA Iowa](#), will visit schools in both Iowa and Missouri in February and March for over 60 performances of *A Dream Fulfilled: The Saga of George Washington Carver*. [Mobile Opera's](#) program, *I Sing America*, traces the contributions of Africans to America's musical culture, and is presented to K-12 school audiences for the first few weeks of February each year.

Even more inclusive than mainstage performances and Black History Month activities is the concept of chronicling African-American culture year-round. [Pensacola Opera's](#) *African American Heritage Music Program* is a lecture and light performance series offered to students in northwest Florida. While the program previously ran during Black History Month, Education Director Tim Kennedy says the schedule is changing this year because "teachers are trying to keep African-American curriculum going throughout the year and not just in February."

Whether celebrating the living, honoring the past or discovering something new, opera continues to explore innovative, informative and exciting ways to present the art form. Both in the community and in the classroom, the companies and productions noted above are simply a few ways in which our art form can connect with African-American culture.