

NATHANIEL DETT CHORALE

Brainerd Blyden-Taylor, conductor

The Nathaniel Dett Chorale is Canada's first professional choral group dedicated to Afrocentric music of all styles, including classical, spiritual, gospel, jazz, folk and blues. These 21 classically-trained, outstanding vocalists have shared the stage with internationally recognized artists such as Juno Award-winning jazz pianist Joe Sealy; opera star Kathleen Battle and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra; the Signal Hill Alumni Choir of Tobago, West Indies; and the Concert Choir of Hampton University, Virginia.

The Chorale has also performed at events honouring world leaders Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and personalities Muhammad Ali and Oscar Peterson. These multi-faceted vocalists, whose talent stretches beyond the traditional expectations of a classical chamber choir, seek to broaden their vision to include all styles and genres of music, from classical to jazz, folk, blues and popular music, as appropriate to the traditions of the African Diaspora.

The Nathaniel Dett Chorale's vision is to build bridges of understanding, appreciation, and acceptance between communities of people, both Afrocentric and other, through the medium of music. The Chorale seeks to dissolve the barriers of stereotype, to empower humans in general, and those of African descent in particular. The Chorale's mission is to be a premier performer of Afrocentric composers — past, present and future - and to be a touchstone for the education of audiences and communities regarding the full spectrum of Afrocentric choral music.

Founder Brainerd Blyden-Taylor named The Chorale after internationally-renowned African-

Canadian composer R. Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943), who performed at such prestigious concert halls as Carnegie Hall and Boston Symphony Hall. Dett was dedicated to the cause of Black music, winning the Bowdoin and Frances Boott prizes in 1920 from Harvard University. Blyden-Taylor established The Chorale to draw attention not only to Dett's legacy, but also to the wealth of Afrocentric choral music, and to be a professional choral group where persons of African heritage could see themselves represented in the majority. Since its inception in 1998, The Nathaniel Dett Chorale has honoured the memory of its namesake, performing a jubilant and uplifting repertoire extensively throughout Ontario and The United States, and delighting national audiences in critically acclaimed extended tours to the Maritimes (2000 & 2004), Quebec (2002), Northern Ontario & Manitoba (2003), and Western Canada (2001, 2004, 2005). The Chorale has also garnered international attention, accepting invitations to perform at Polyfolia 2004 in France and the 7th World Symposium on Choral Music in Japan, 2005.

In November 2002, The Nathaniel Dett Chorale proudly released its first CD, *Listen to the Lambs* — an historic first commercial recording of the choral works of R. Nathaniel Dett. February 2003 saw the release of Gemini Award-winning *Carry Me Home: The Story & Music of The Nathaniel Dett Chorale*, a documentary celebrating this unique ensemble and their place in Canada's musical spectrum. *Carry Me Home* and a concert film based on The Nathaniel Dett Chorale's *An Indigo Christmas* concert were released on DVD in 2004. A live CD of *An Indigo Christmas* was previously released in 2003.