

Byron Cage: Ministering God's Word through music

Written by Teria Rogers, Special to the NNPA from the Afro-American Newspaper
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On a recent Thursday, evening at Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church in Fort Washington, music minister Byron Cage counted down the tasks he needed to complete in preparation for an evening service.

On this particular night, he readied for a special men's worship service featuring Bishop Walter Scott Thomas and his men's choir from New Psalmist Baptist Church in Baltimore, Md.

"This is the calm before the storm. In the next 15 minutes it's going to get extremely busy," Cage said rushing out of his office and heading for a nearby staircase.

For 15 years, Cage has served at Ebenezer under the leadership of Rev. Grainger Browning Jr. and Rev. Jo Ann Browning, helping to drive membership of the megachurch to more than 12,000. As if that didn't keep him busy enough, Cage earlier this year accepted a similar post at Saint Paul's Baptist Church in Richmond, Va. He also continues to write and record music.

"I direct two choirs there [Saint Paul's] and two choirs here," he said in an interview at Ebenezer. "Rehearsals are Monday at Ebenezer, Tuesdays and Wednesdays in Richmond...I spend two Sundays here and two Sundays there."

His busy life, which includes rushing up and down I-95 between Richmond and suburban Maryland, requires organization and scheduling. As he spoke, he inspected the choir stand at Ebenezer to ensure that it was ready for the night's visitors.

"When I came to Ebenezer, I was able to develop a new sound because they were very traditional," he said. "Now we do everything from praise and worship to hymns, anthems and spirituals."

Besides his church work, Cage is a chart-topping gospel artist. He has released nine albums, the most recent, "Memoirs of a Worshipper," in June. The current single, "Great and Mighty," is currently number 10 on the gospel singles charts.

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He has been nominated and won several awards, including six Stellar Awards.

The work as a church music minister is not as glamorous as his life as a top gospel artist. On this evening, he had the responsibility of opening the door to the choir room for Ebenezer's King's Men Choir and the adjoining room for the men's choir of New Psalmist Baptist Church. He steamed clothes, inspected the choir performance area, checked dates for the men's choir at Ebenezer, practiced a new arrangement of the hymn, the Lord's Prayer, and updated details of an upcoming church visit.

"We are wearing our blue bowties on Sunday," he informed the Ebenezer men's choir members. "If you don't have one please see Brother Jefferson."

Cage said his priorities include extending his work into radio and television. He has also been tapped to do the Sunday afternoon program on Praise 104.1 gospel radio in Washington, D.C. Additionally, Cage is working on a book, his first praise and worship conference and reality TV projects.

"It's been a great journey," he said. "I am hosting my 50th birthday party next month and I'm just grateful to be around and as relevant as I have been in this industry. I'm certainly not complaining. I have three jobs when everybody is still looking for work. I just gotta take my adult naps when I can."