

California Polytechnic State University

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Cal Poly Arts Brings Blind Boys of Alabama to Cohan Center

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- On Thursday, December 2 at 8 p.m. in the Christopher Cohan Center, the Blind Boys of Alabama return to San Luis Obispo with their first-ever Christmas concert, "Go Tell It On The Mountain."

The Blind Boys of Alabama deliver "faith, soul, and quality by the truckload," raves Billboard Magazine.

The Blind Boys of Alabama have spread the spirit and energy of pure soul gospel music for over 60 years, when the first version of the group formed at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Blind in 1939.

Cal Poly Arts presents the Grammy-winning, 7-member ensemble in a big, buoyant holiday show for all ages. Audiences can look forward to church-fired, "gospelized" renditions of cherished classics such as "Joy to the World," "O Come All Ye Faithful," and "Silent Night."

The group is touring during the holiday season in support of their popular CD release, "Go Tell It On The Mountain."

For Clarence Fountain, founder and leader of The Blind Boys of Alabama, his earliest memories of Christmas are among the most vivid.

"I must've been about three or four years old, living with my family in Tyler, Alabama, in Dallas County. We were out in the country and didn't get to town but once in a while. Christmas was the one day that us kids all got some candy and some apples and oranges.

"Didn't have anything else – we were too poor to buy anything else. But I knew it was Christmas, because that was the only time I got those things all at the same time – the candy and the apples and the oranges."

Fountain reports that the Blind Boys have always wanted to cut a Christmas album, "...we just never got it together before."

"Go Tell It On the Mountain" is both a traditional and innovative

12-song collection filled with genre-crossing guest vocal appearances by Solomon Burke, George Clinton, Michael Franti, Chrissie Hynde, Shelby Lynne, Les McCann, Aaron Neville, Mavis Staples, and Tom Waits.

There are also special instrumental guest performances by Richard Thompson and Robert Randolph

Soulman Solomon Burke has "...always idolized the Blind Boys. They have been around for more than 60 years and still, here they are: the hottest, workin', movin', groovin', jumpin', singin', shoutin' gospel quartet in America – I'd say in the world!"

"I was listening to the Blind Boys back in the Fifties," says singer Aaron Neville. "My brothers and I used to walk down the street harmonizing, trying to sound like the Blind Boys. Their singing still sends chills down my spine – they've got that old soul!"

Steel-pedal guitarist Robert Randolph agrees, "(That) is what's so cool about being affiliated with the Blind Boys: Their music gives you a feeling you just can't get from anyone else."

The Blind Boys of Alabama worked for more than 40 years on the traditional gospel circuit. In 1983, their career reached a turning point with their role in the smash hit musical drama, "The Gospel at Colonus."

The production's Obie Award-winning Off-Broadway and Broadway success, coupled with the group's appearance on two original soundtrack albums, brought the Blind Boys' timeless sound to an enthusiastic new audience.

Their 1992 album, "Deep River," produced by Booker T. Jones and featuring a transcendent version of Bob Dylan's "I Believe In You," earned the Blind Boys their first Grammy Award nomination.

It was, as their executive producer and long-time booking agent Chris Goldsmith notes, "the first time the Blind Boys ventured into 'gospelizing' relevant contemporary songs that weren't traditional soul-gospel songs."

In 1995, the Blind Boys released the live album, "I Brought Him With Me," followed in 1997 by "Holding On," an experiment in funk-ed-up contemporary gospel.

In 2001, the Blind Boys' "Spirit of the Century" delivered a set of hot-wired traditional gospel and carefully chosen contemporary songs that became the group's best-selling album to date and won the 2001 Grammy Award for Best Traditional Soul Gospel Album.

"Higher Ground," a spiritual excavation into the soul music tradition, earned the group its second consecutive Grammy Award for Best Traditional Soul Gospel Album in 2002.

That same year, during the 34th annual Dove Awards sponsored by the

Gospel Music Association, the Blind Boys of Alabama were inducted into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame and presented with the Dove Award for “Higher Ground” as the Best Traditional Gospel Album.

Tickets for the performance range from \$26 - \$38, with student discounts available, and may be purchased at the Performing Arts Ticket Office, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays. To order by phone, call 805/756-2787; to order by fax: 805/756-6088. Order on-line at www.pacslo.org.

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