

AKOMA: A HERSTORJCAL CHRONOLOGY

AKOMA HERSTORY 2016-2017

We cannot change the past, but we can change our attitude toward it. Uproot guilt & plant forgiveness. Tear out arrogance & seed humility.
Exchange LOVE for hate; [thereby, making the present comfortable & the future promising.] -Maya Angelou

OVERVIEW

AKOMA is Rochester's African American Women's Gospel Choir whose West African Akan name means patience, endurance, consistency and faithfulness. **AKOMA's** Adinkra symbol, the heart, indicates compassion, tenderness and charity. **AKOMA's** vocal and spoken word ministry is rooted in the African American sacred song and oral traditions.

After a debut performance in August of 1995 for Woman Fest-a day-long celebration of the 75th Anniversary of Women's Right to vote-the group of thirty-five women decided to embrace a musical ministry that reflects their diverse faith traditions and love for gospel music. The group adopted the name **AKOMA** because it symbolizes their African heritage, spiritual roots and desire to serve the Rochester community. Dr. David A. Anderson/Sankofa recommended the name **AKOMA**, based on research and knowledge of the group's mission. Twenty six Rochester area churches currently are represented on **AKOMA's** 2016-2017 roster of 52 active sister-members.

On June 22, 1996, **AKOMA** made her debut concert and established the Nona Patterson Chambers (NPC) Scholarship in honor of her elder member and adopted mother. Three recipients received the Mother Nona Scholarship in its first year. Since that time and including the nine 2017 recipients, **AKOMA** has awarded one hundred and fourteen college-bound young African American women, a portion of the more than \$126,000 collected as a part of the NPC Scholarship fund.

2016-2017 AKOMA Concert Year

Under the dedicated leadership of Founder/Executive Director, Dr. Arlette Miller Smith, and Executive Music Director, Gloria Brooks **AKOMA** began her program year singing on the Gospel stage at the Clarissa Street reunion in August, 2016. She was invited to participate in the Fringe Festival in Kilbourn Hall on September 18th. The fall season also began the launch of **AKOMA's** new website. In October, she sang during the Harvest Festival celebrated at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. November found her presenting a concert at the historic Century Club of Rochester's building at the club's invitation. On March 2, 2017 **AKOMA** again shared praises with the Voices of Thunder during the City of Rochester's annual Heritage Concert. At the invitation of Grace Choir, **AKOMA** presented a joint service of praise at Memorial AME Zion Church on March 26th. She joined with St. Luke Tabernacle Community Church to render selections during its Spring Revival Service on May 17th. **AKOMA's** official concert season will culminate with her twenty-second annual Scholarship Concert on Saturday June 10, 2017 at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. However, she will participate in celebrating the retirement on June 23, 2017 of her Executive Music Director, Gloria Brooks, from teaching in the Rochester City School District.

ADDITIONAL CHRONOLOGY (See AKOMA.org for complete herstory)

Since her 1995 inception year, **AKOMA** has been privileged to sing with Grammy Award winner Larnelle Harris; to appear on a number of local television shows; to provide music for a program featuring Seattle poet laureate Mona Lake Jones who wrote the poem, "A Room Full of Sisters" which **AKOMA** uses as her spoken word anthem; to provide the music for programs honoring Bishop Desmond Tutu; to sing with the Penfield Symphony at several of their annual holiday concerts; and to be featured at the National Black Catholic Congress Conference in Buffalo, New York. Early in her spiritual life, **AKOMA** also was blessed to present a commissioned docudrama, "Stirring the Waters, Tending the Pots," written by her founder, Arlette Miller Smith. "Stirring," a suffrage-related drama, was performed at Geva Theatre as a part of the 150th anniversary of the women's rights convention at Seneca Falls.

AKOMA's current Executive Music Director is Gloria Brooks; the Scholarship Commission Chair is Donna M. Jones; the Director of Bookings and Concert Confirmation is Ruth Anderson. The Founder, Executive & Artistic Director is Dr. Arlette Miller Smith.

The herstory of **AKOMA's** evolution as an organization is the title of the unpublished dissertation: *Speaking the Song, Spreading the Word, Lifting the People---The Reimagination of Community Through Vocal Music Activism* (2005) by Dr. Arlette Miller Smith. Allison Thorp's 2016 dissertation, *Testify, Heal, Empower: A Phenomenological Investigation of Three Urban, socially Identified, Community Choirs*, includes the music, message, and ministry of **AKOMA**.

For **AKOMA** concert bookings, please email akomagc@gmail.com; visit our website at www.akoma.org; "like" us on Facebook; and Twitter.

And with my song... will I praise Him. (Ps. 28:7)

