

# IMANI FELLOWSHIP CHOIR

*Resident Choir of the Townsend School of Music and Arts*

In 1989, when community choirs were taking over main stages all across the Pacific Northwest, Minister Sam L. Townsend, Jr. was content playing the organ, leading praise and worship, writing simple songs for the youth choir, and directing the adult choir at his local church. Having a sense that there was something greater for him to do in music ministry, he stepped out at the age of 19 and recorded a dozen of his songs on his first project, "Worship the Lord", with the Greater Glory Ministries Church of God in Christ Mass Choir. Little did he know, that would be the first of many recordings. Although the perplexities of young adult life distracted him from writing music for several years, he continued to work in his church and community exercising other gifts in preaching the gospel, church administration, and later began working for Washington State's first African-American recruitment agency for African-American Adoptions.

With music ministry still being his first love, Townsend hosted his first city-wide No More Vain Glory Music Workshop and Concert, featuring over 100 singers, choir directors, workshop facilitators and musicians in the Seattle area. Townsend recalls, *"The anointing that saturated the concert that night was God's seal of approval on the public ministry that I felt was being birthed in me."* In 1996, following the direction of God and the mentorship of the Late Min. O'Landa Draper, Townsend announced the inception of the Imani Fellowship Choir. When asked what would set his fellowship choir apart from the many other thriving community choirs in the area, Townsend replied, *"This choir has to be different than the rest. God has called this ministry to live the life we sing about, and to live it according to God's standard of holiness and not the community's relaxed version of it. Our mission is to keep the standard of ministry lifted above an average life. Not that we'll be perfect, be we will be real, we will be relevant, and we will be effective."* This unique ministry has remained true to that call and is known for being a pioneer of music exploration.

In 1998, Spectrasonics released the award-winning Vocal Planet sample library. This Five Disc CD-ROM set produced by Eric Persing and Roby Duke was the world's only collection of Black Gospel Choir multi-samples. The Imani Fellowship Choir was among those voices, and that experience was the motivation Townsend needed to begin writing and recording his own music again, this time with Imani. In the spring of 1999, Imani released their first full CD, "Remember Your Blessings", and toured with the project for the next 3 year in Southern California, Georgia, Oregon, and Canada. In 2000, Imani recorded the background vocals on Terry Clark's Newport label release, "Only Believe". Townsend directed the vocal arrangements of the choir. In 2004, while battling life threatening health issues, Townsend penned and released Imani's signature balled, "I'm Blessed". Townsend's testimony is, *"What my eyes cannot see, my heart still believes. Oh yes, yes I am blessed."*

Townsend and Imani have received recognition and dozens of awards for Best Gospel Choir and Best Choir Director from various radio stations, religious and civic organizations including in 2008, being the first place winners of the McDonald Gospel Fest held in Newark, NJ. Townsend's notable work in Social and Human Services also brought the choir's ministry to the attention of the state's legislature. In 2009, they were selected to sing at the Seattle Inaugural Celebration of President Barack Obama, and in September 2011, after terrorist attack on America, the Governor's office of Washington State contacted Townsend, requesting the Imani Fellowship Choir to provide the music ministry for the states participation in the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance. Accepting the honor, Townsend and his choir were televised at Westlake Center in downtown Seattle as they led several thousand people in songs of reflection, faith, and hope.

Combining youthful energy with a seasoned sound, their ministry and performances have impacted audiences inside and outside the church. Their theatrical stage appearances include The Lion King and Colors of Christmas Tour with Peabo Bryson, Christopher Cross, Sheena Easton and Oleta Adams, both at the Paramount, performing with Michael Buble Seattle Symphony McCaw Hall, and performing in Black Nativity at the Moore Theater.

Townsend also produced a sold-out gospel concert at Benaroya Hall featuring Michelle Lang & Still Water and national recording artist Dave Hollister. Imani has ministered with a host of gospel legends including Karen Clark-Sheard, Kim Burrell, Evangelist Dorinda Clark-Cole, the late Minister O'Landa Draper, Ted & Sheri, Evangelist Beverly Crawford, and Vanessa Bell-Armstrong. In 2012, Comcast Music Partnership along with Sony Music Entertainment announced the national release of Sam Townsend & Imani "Do It Again". This ministry continues to be herald as a key component of the Pacific Northwest's Contemporary Gospel Music scene.