

Black history celebration concert is Saturday

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Staff Report



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Performing a free concert Saturday at 7 p.m. at the Andy Griffith Playhouse are The Allen Boys. The group includes DaShawn Hickman, center, on steel guitar; Mitchel Fonville, left, on bass; Ranzy Moore playing drums; and, not pictured, Camron Moore on guitar. -

The Surry Arts Council's 27th-annual free Black History Month Celebration will be held Saturday at 7 p.m. at the Andy Griffith Playhouse. It brings local talent S.T.A.R. and The Allen Boys together for an evening of celebration.

The Allen Boys are DaShawn Hickman, on steel guitar, Mitchel Fonville on bass, Camron Moore on guitar, and Ranzy Moore playing the drums. They are the only touring sacred steel band in North Carolina.

The guys grew up in the small House of God Church in Mount Airy where they played for church services and developed their chemistry and their music. Encouraged by their musical families, they formed the group and began touring. As the band's Facebook page says "The music that we play makes you forget about everything that happened in the day and just have fun."

The modern pedal steel guitar has its roots in Hawaiian lap steel, but African-American House of God Churches transformed the playing style in the 1930s. Unlike most other musical styles, where a lead guitar or an organ drives the service, in this style the pedal steel guitar takes the lead, sometimes even mimicking singing. Artists like Robert Randolph of Robert Randolph and the Family Band, Chuck Campbell of The Campbell Brothers, and Calvin Cooke have taken the sound beyond the church and helped to popularize it.

S.T.A.R. will open the concert. The group's official name is the "Christopher's S.T.A.R. Project," or Start Training At Root Project.

The group was started by J.R. Fonville in April 2017 following the death of his brother, Christopher, a singer and musician. J.R. and Christopher worked with children to strengthen their morals and Biblical knowledge through music. They have projects including "Covers of Love" where they learn to crochet blankets and then give them to hospitals and nursing homes.

Their primary goal is to raise money to assist local children with college scholarships. Last year they contributed to four students who are attending college. Scott Hale, music teacher at Jones Intermediate School and local minister, is the choir director and J.R. Fonville is the coordinator. S.T.A.R has 33 members and is growing.

This event is presented by the Surry Arts Council and sponsored in part by a Grassroots Grant from the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. For additional information, contact Antonia Cawley, Director of Operations, at (336) 786-7998 or antonia@surryarts.org.