

## Mostly white choir sings of black pain

Mark De Lisser is a black Christian leading a predominantly white choir which has recorded an album of songs sung by black slaves longing for freedom from white oppressors. Talk about turning history on its head.

The album, called *The Spirituals*, contains seven well-known spirituals including *Deep River*, *Steal Away*, *Everytime I Hear the Spirit* and *Motherless Child*. The project came about as a result of De Lisser putting his singers, the ACM choir, through an arduous process. He prepared choir members by teaching them about the Transatlantic slave trade that occurred between the 15th and 19th centuries. He also took them to the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool to give them an even greater understanding of slavery. And when the album was being recorded he kept them in a studio for 48 hours, with no food and no contact with the outside world so they could focus on the task at hand. De Lisser, the choir's founder, revealed that the process was difficult. "They found it painful and tough and they knew nothing about it. The process of how people were enslaved was an eye-opener for them and it was good for me and good for them to go through the experience." The resulting recording is a unique, rendition of the spirituals, filled with passion, meaning and heartfelt emotion. There is also an accompanying documentary, which follows choir members as they learn more about slavery and their reactions to it - often times incredulous at the inhumanity and barbarity of it all. The film also gives an insight into the recording process. *The Spirituals* is a far cry from the type of material the choir normally does. De Lisser was raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brixton, south London, and gained experience performing in a number of gospel outfits, including the renowned Kingdom Choir directed by Karen Gibson. He became a full-time musician in 2000 and formed the ACM choir in 2005 at the Academy of Contemporary Music in Guildhall. The ACM achieved nationwide fame in 2008 when they entered the BBC1 TV competition 'Last Choir Standing'. The group made it to the semifinals and was dubbed the youngest and hippest choir, as well as being hailed the stars of the show. Since the appearance the group has gone on to tour with major music stars such as Russell Watson, perform alongside artistes like Beverley Knight, JLS and Alexander Burke and record with pop luminaries like Robbie Williams, as well as perform for The Queen. Following the completion of the album, De Lisser plans to take the choir on tour in schools, theatres and colleges to teach a new generation about the history of slavery.

Visit [www.acmgospelchoir.com](http://www.acmgospelchoir.com) for more details.

Source: The Gleaner