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### Letter, 1992 December, from Mary Fuller to ?

Mary Fuller

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[Dec 1992]

Mary, If you like this, lets go ahead  
and make up a nice packet. We need  
to do more making 1st.

Dear

created

1992).

I am excited to invite you to become a member of a national committee to commemorate the 100th birthday of Dr. Eva Jessye (in 1995) (1895-1995). These of you who knew her fully understand the tremendous contribution she made to African-American music and culture. You also understand how her musical brilliance and presence deeply affected a wide range of musicians, writers, singers, choral directors, and other Americans in the pursuit of creativity, equality and social justice. Among the many honors she received during her illustrious and productive lifetime, Dr. Jessye was as an inductee in the Song Writers Hall of Fame and saluted by former mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta as "A Most Distinguished Citizen of The World."

The roots of Dr. Jessye's life and work lie in the Negro spiritual. She would often tell those closest to her that the spiritual, with its message of suffering, hope, joy, and sorrow, spoke to the deeper aspirations of mankind of all races, colors, and nationalities. Given these beliefs, it is not surprising that Dr. Jessye was appointed choral director of "Porgy & Bess" by the composer George Gershwin in 1935, and the Eva Jessye Choir appeared countless times on the stage of the Capitol Theater on Broadway and the Major Bowes Family Radio Hour. Fittingly, one of the last performances that she wrote, produced, and directed at the University of Michigan in 1978 (at the age of 81) was "Songs For The Soul: The Negro Spiritual."

1878  
1895  
83

83

In Dr. Jessye's honor, we are planning a 100-year commemorative celebration in Pittsburg, Kansas, in the fall of 1995. The centerpiece of this event will be the production of a television special recreating the 1978 performance of "Songs For The Soul: The Negro Spiritual." We hope to interest network television by securing the support of leading black actresses, actors, writers, musicians, and singers to honor a woman whose courageous path helped make possible the road they travel today. We also intend to seek funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities for the production of a feature documentary film on Eva Jessye's life and music, the publication of an illustrated book of Dr. Jessye's 65 years of poetry, and a biography of Dr. Jessye's life story. These materials will be distributed to schools, churches, youth groups, cultural associations, and other organizations to inspire others through Dr. Jessye's example.

Dr. Jessye's personal collection is housed at Pittsburg State University and Gene Eugene De Gruson, the Curator of Special Collections and University Archivist, has pledged his support to help make this event truly memorable. Dr. Willis Patterson, Dean of the School of Music and Director of the Eva Jessye Collection at the University of Michigan, has also pledged his cooperation for our efforts.

During her lifetime, Dr. Jessye <sup>was</sup> ~~an~~ <sup>my</sup> ~~extreme~~ <sup>was, leaving</sup> ~~generosity~~ left few resources at the time of her death. In spite of her financial circumstances, she wanted a fund established in her name so that money made on royalties from her music or written works could help aspiring young talent to continue working on their own dreams. I have created the Eva Jessye Award Fund for precisely this reason. Currently the Award Fund is housed at LifeSpan Resources, a 501(C)3 corporation, under the direction of Carol Tice in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Carol was one of Dr. Jessye's closest friends for the last twenty years of her life. We are currently investigating how we might set up an independent 501(C)3 corporation here in St. Louis to administer the Award Fund. We hope the 100th birthday celebration will raise sufficient funds to realize one of Dr. Jessye's most important concerns—assisting young talent of all races, colors, creeds, and nationalities.

Those of us working on the 1995 celebration need your help. We are attempting to raise an initial \$50,000 over the next six months to hire a grant writer, develop a complete proposal, cover administrative costs, contact and secure support from the black entertainment community, and interest the networks in "Songs For The Soul." I would like you to be a founding member of "Songs For The Soul." Your personal commitment and generous contribution would help us establish the credibility we need and generate the funds necessary to begin our work. You will receive updates twice a year reporting how the celebration and our other projects are progressing. Hopefully you will offer us other names and suggestions on how we can make contacts or secure funding.

National  
Committee

We are hopefully moving into a new era of change, understanding and community. The black spiritual transcends national and racial differences, proclaiming the love for fellow human beings, sorrow for the suffering and the strength offered by hope. These are all qualities this country needs as we move toward a new century. Dr. Jessye was ahead of her time. Let us build on her nearly 100 years of experience to encourage a new and better world for ourselves and generations yet to come.

Sincerely,

Mary Fuller

*NA. General M.C.C.*

Mary, this letter would be accompanied by a card that said something like: I'm proud to be a member of the national committee for the 1995 Songs For the ~~The~~ Soul Celebration. I am willing to make a tax deductible contribution of

I would be happy to suggest the following individuals and organizations for additional contacts \_\_\_\_\_ . There would also be a page biography of Dr. Jessye. Please think of this as a rough draft. I am also working on a concept paper for the performance based on this letter. Please get back with your comments. Jim and Wendy

*Jim & Wendy*