

# Students express 'Power of the Black Artist'

**Amanda Karioth Thompson**  
Council on Culture & Arts

More than a decade before "The Star-Spangled Banner" officially became America's national anthem, "Lift Every Voice" was dubbed "The Negro National Anthem" by the NAACP.

Originally written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson in 1900, "Lift Every Voice" was set to music five years later by his brother John Rosamond Johnson. Since then, it has been recorded and performed by numerous artists including Anita Baker, Dionne Warwick, Stevie Wonder, and Beyoncé in 2018 at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival.

The latest group of artists to make it their own are students from Godby High School. In celebration of Black History Month, the song will open an arts extravaganza called "The Power of the Black Artist." The program will be split into three parts.

The first part honors the past by highlighting artists from the Harlem



**Godby's production called "The Power of the Black Artist" is a collaboration between the school's band, dance, chorus, and drama programs.** SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

Renaissance. The second focuses on the present by showcasing artists between the Civil Rights Movement and today. The last looks to the future by featuring all original work from both current students and alumni.

A collaboration between the school's band, dance, chorus, and drama programs, the production is packed with examples of black artists who have

brought about positive change. This show will give Godby arts students an opportunity to join their ranks.

Treveon Miller is an 11th-grade actor and vocalist. He's been performing since he was a child and his favorite part of this production is "Lift Every Voice."

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# Artist

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Chorus teacher Krystena Hutchins has arranged an ending that Treveon finds especially moving. "When my friends and I start singing, the words hit me and make me evaluate and think about what we're singing." Throughout the preparations for this production, Godby's arts faculty members have put an emphasis on not only learning the material but also understanding the context surrounding the material.

Cheryl Wimberley, director of dance studies said, "I've had the students really delve into dance history. I want them to take what they know right now from YouTube and modern dance and I want them to dig a bit deeper. It's important for them to know how it all connects."

Jazmine Gant is eager to do just that. She'll be performing a piece originally choreographed by African-American dancer and choreographer, Alvin Ailey.

Much like Ailey, Jazmine finds dance to be an intensely spiritual and emotional form of expression. The 10th-grader said, "I dance because it's my way out. When I'm going through hard times, I dance. Dance is everything to me, it comes from my soul and when I'm dancing, I'm the best me I can be."

Godby's band director, Timotheus Harper, is also committed to creating opportunities for his students to shine. Catering to their strengths, he arranges music specifically for them.

Harper explained for this performance, "we're targeting jazz because jazz has so much to do with cultivating what music is today. The kids are really excited to be playing this kind of literature because usually

they're playing marching band or concert band music. It's cool for them to be opening up this realm of music they haven't put their fingers on yet."

French horn and trumpet player, Alantis Austin agrees. As a ninth-grader, he's eager to learn more about the genre. "I feel like it helps connect me with my past. Playing music, like in jazz clubs during segregation, that was a big part of African-American history," said Alantis. "It's one thing when you're being taught about what happened, like a teacher in front of you talking, but when you're actually playing and performing, it gives you more of a sense that you're a part of that history."

"The Power of the Black Artist" is open to the general public at 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 28, at the Godby High School auditorium. Tickets are \$5 and only available at

## If you go

**What:** The Power of the Black Artist"

**When:** 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 28

**Where:** Godby High School auditorium

**Tickets:** \$5 available at the door on a first come, first served basis

the door on a first come, first served basis. Audience members will enjoy works by Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes, Alvin Ailey, Bob Marley, James Brown, Nina Simone, Aretha Franklin, Tupac Shakur, and many more. The program content is appropriate for all ages.

*Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Interim Executive Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).*

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