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David Amran and Antoinette Montague performed "Let Freedom Ring." (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)

Great Hall show rekindles spirit of '63 March on Washington

SEPTEMBER 25, 2023

BY JEFFERSON SIEGEL | Through the lens of history, the Sixties decade is often remembered as an era of peace and love. It was also a time of seismic upheaval as the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement shook the country to its core.

Last Thursday night, Sept. 21, people who entered The Cooper Union's Great Hall found

themselves transported back to that decade — specifically to 1963 and the march for civil rights in Washington, D.C.



Peter Yarrow of the iconic folk music group Peter, Paul and Mary, who was present at the 1963 March on Washington, performed "If I Had A Hammer." (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)





Singer Lori Sinclair Minor (center) channeled gospel singer Mahalia Jackson's performance (photo at rear) at the 1963 March on Washington. (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)

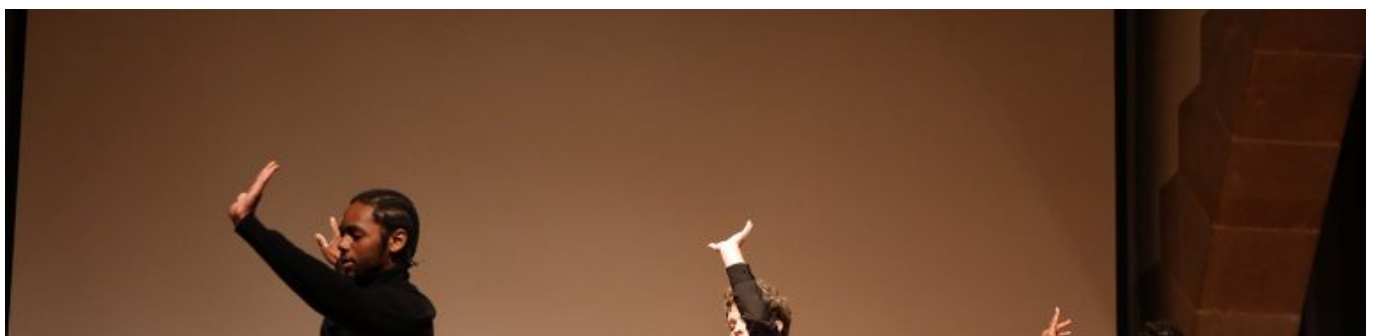
As part of The Village Trip's two-week-long Festival of Arts and Activism, the music, dance and spoken performances of "Let Freedom Ring!" recounted a day 60 years ago in August 1963, when a quarter million people made their way to the nation's capital in what became a turning point in the fight for equal rights.

The evening started with a video greeting from folk musician Judy Collins.

"Just a simple thing, like registering to vote...was terrifying to people who could not vote," Collins recounted of the period.



Judy Collins delivered an opening message via a recorded video at the "Let Freedom Ring" performance. (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)





Dancers performed. (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)

Throughout the evening, several music and dance performances recalled the struggles of the time, including dance pieces choreographed by Tiffany Rea-Fisher and a trumpet invocation by Nabate Isles. Lori Sinclair Minor channeled a song by the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. Fred Johnson and Hasan Bakr provided a sound sculpture.

Daniel Carlton's play "March On" formed the spine of the evening's performance, which was directed by David Deblinger of HB Studio. The focal point centered around the words of a naive wire service reporter unfamiliar with the travails then suffered by Blacks. Hearing their stories, it slowly dawned on the correspondent that the growing crowd wanted nothing more than the basic rights he was already privileged to enjoy. The reporter expressed amazement while recounting how the crowd, at first 5,000, then 10,000 and ultimately a quarter million people, stood peacefully under a sweltering sun as the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. intoned his "I Have A Dream" speech.





David Amran (left), Peter Yarrow's daughter Bethany (center) and Peter Yarrow of the iconic folk music group Peter, Paul and Mary, who was at the 1963 March on Washington, performed "Blowing In The Wind." (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)



The entire cast joined Peter Yarrow's daughter Bethany (left), Antoinette Montague (center) and Peter Yarrow (right) as they performed "This Little Light of Mine." Daniel Carlton, whose play provided the evening's narrative structure, is at far left, wearing white hat. (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)





Recreating the 1963 March on Washington. (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)

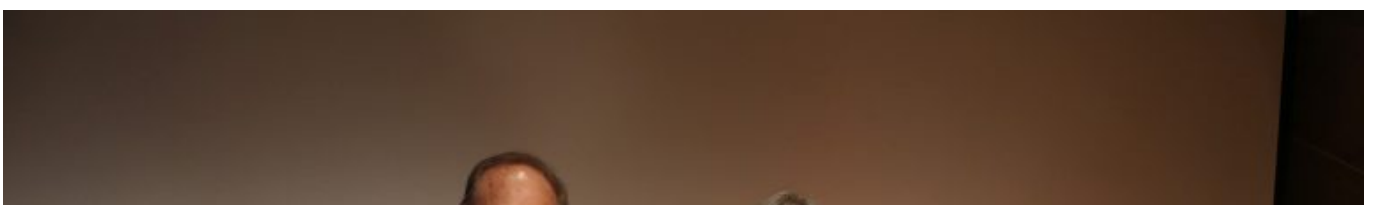
David Amram on piano accompanied Antoinette Montague as she sang “Let Freedom Ring,” which brought the audience to their feet, and they stayed standing as the music continued with protest standards “If I Had A Hammer” and “This Little Light of Mine.”

And then a performer who had been present at the 1963 march, Peter Yarrow of the group Peter Paul and Mary, slowly made his way up the stage steps, accompanied by his daughter Bethany.

At 85 years old, Yarrow moved cautiously until he began strumming his guitar, and suddenly the 25-year-old Yarrow materialized, bringing all on stage and in the audience together in a group sing-along of “Blowing In The Wind.”



Peter Yarrow, formerly of Peter, Paul and Mary, helped rekindle the spirit of the 1963 March on Washington at the Great Hall event. (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)





Cliff Pearson and Liz Thomson, the joint artistic directors of the annual Village Trip festival. (Photo by © Jefferson Siegel)

The Village Trip started in 2018 and the annual September event has grown to include dozens of music and dance performances, as well as talks, walks and films, stretching over more than two weeks.



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One Comment



Dan Alterman
SEPTEMBER 28, 2023

Nice job, Jeff. I was at the capital and remember Peter, Paul and Mary sing and it was a glorious day. Respect.
— Dan Alterman, Tribeca

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