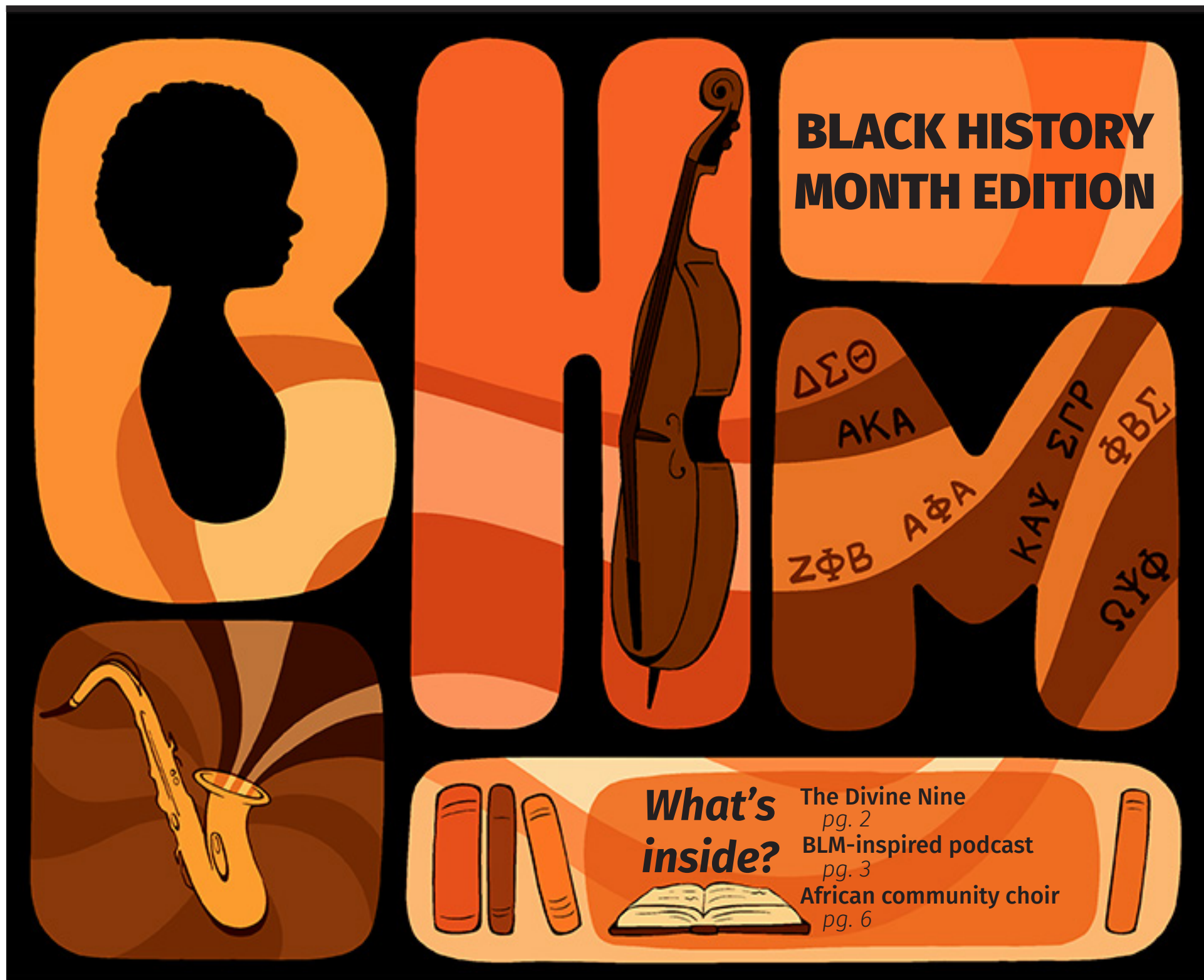


BU BAYLOR LARIAT

News for the students by the students



‘Divine Nine’ sororities, fraternities provide lifelong community for members

CAITLYN MEISNER
Copy Editor

The Divine Nine sororities and fraternities, seven of which are active on Baylor’s campus, have provided a sisterhood and brotherhood promoted through service and a sense of belonging.

Many of the Divine Nine organizations were founded at Howard University in 1930 at a time when Black students were not allowed to join Greek-letter organizations at white institutions. 37% of the female population at Baylor is a part of a sorority, whether that be a National Pan-Hellenic Council, Unified Greek Council or the Panhellenic Council. Of those, 37 women are members of the National Pan-Hellenic Council, which constitute the Divine Nine organizations.

The sorority chapters that make up the Divine Nine at Baylor include the Nu Iota chapter of Zeta Phi Beta, the Rho Eta chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, the Pi Mu chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha and the Xi Chi chapter of Sigma Gamma Rho.

Of the male population on campus, 19% are a part of a fraternity. Of those, 22 men call

the Divine Nine their home away from home. The fraternity chapters include the Tau Alpha chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, the Xi Sigma chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi and the Nu Zeta chapter of Phi Beta Sigma.

Houston sophomore Makayla Williams, president of Zeta Phi Beta, said it was important for her to find a safe space. According to Baylor’s Institutional Research and Testing, minority students make up 38.3% of the student body.

“Especially [because] I attended a predominately white high school that was also a Christian private school, it was hard to find representation both in and outside of the classroom,” Williams said. “Coming to Baylor, one of my biggest things was, ‘OK, how can I find these safe spaces where I’m surrounded by people who look like me, who want to bring more diversity to Baylor and want to serve their communities in different ways?’”

Williams said she immediately felt welcomed by the women who reached out to her because she felt like she was truly a part of the Baylor family. She said she wanted to embrace the spaces that were created for her and were meant to uplift other minorities.



Katy Mae Turner | Photographer

COMMUNITY Delta Sigma Theta performs in Phi Beta Sigma’s 2022 Homecoming Stroll-Off.

Houston junior Chris Kariuki, a member of Phi Beta Sigma, said he chose a Divine Nine fraternity over an Interfraternity Council organization because he always felt out of place at predominately white institutions.

“I have no problem adapting, but it’s nice to have a community that looks like you and have the same struggles as you that you can go to about,” Kariuki said.

Dallas junior Myia Fox, president of Delta Sigma Theta, said she has always “been big” on joining groups of women who look like and can relate to her.

“Culture is a big deal for me, especially if you’re going to spend a lot of time doing work and speaking to each other,” Fox said. “It’s important to relate to each other and to be surrounding yourself with like-minded women

and [have] similar backgrounds.”

Fox said at Delta Sigma Theta, sisterhood is a lifetime commitment to community, no matter where she is.

“I have gone to grocery stores, been at work and forgot I was wearing my Delta Sigma Theta bracelet, and have met other women who have literally welcomed me with a hug,” Fox said. “Where else can you experience something like that? You’re complete strangers, but are relating in the fact you both joined an organization that values sisterhood and loving each other as Black women.”

Williams said she hopes her sisters remember that, once they graduate, they will always have a sisterhood.

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Opinion

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Lariat Letters

To submit a Lariat Letter, email Lariat-Letters@baylor.edu. Letters should be a maximum of 400 words. The letter is not guaranteed to be published.

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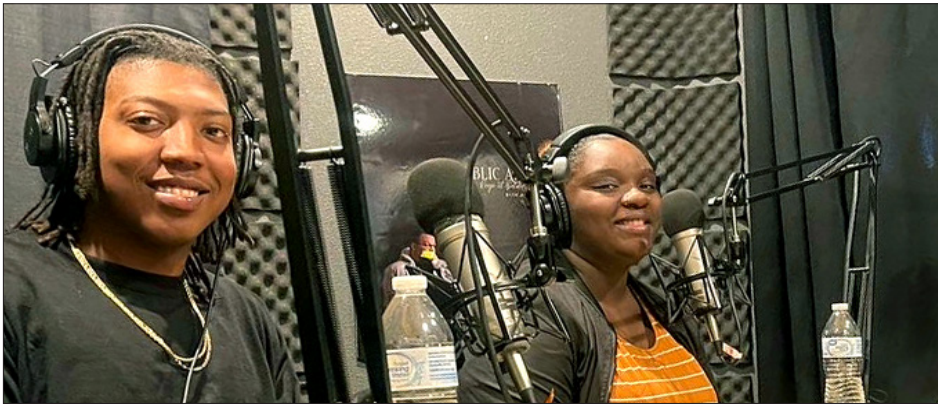


Photo courtesy of De'Viar Woodson

SPEAKING UP Waco locals De'Viar Woodson and Jasmine Bledsoe created the "Stories of the Streets" podcast, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement.

'Stories of the Streets' podcast gives voice to Waco community

AVERY BALLMANN
Staff Writer

During the summer of 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement gained momentum and several non profit and social justice groups in Waco were formed.

Waco locals De'Viar Woodson and Jasmine Bledsoe co-host the "Stories of the Streets" podcast with the help of Change Waco, a non profit focused on racial equity and local criminal justice, The New Black Collective, a local no profit that teaches financial literacy and Rogue Media Network, a local podcast production company

"It's a space to continue these types of conversations," Woodson said. "So that's why I did this, because it wasn't necessarily something dangerous or super active to do, but it still kept the conversation going."

On May 31, 2020, Woodson and BLACCENT, a Waco non profit, assembled a BLM protest in under 24 hours that drew over 400 participants, nearly all masked due to the COVID-19 pandemic. That month, Bledsoe also helped found Change Waco.

With their expertise, Bledsoe and Woodson began the "Stories of the Streets" podcast to amplify voices of Waco's community members in July 2020.

"We allow people who have stories of life, because that's really what it's about, fighting injustice," Bledsoe said. "We give them a safe space to come speak to us."

"Stories of the Streets" is in its fourth season. Each episode is based on the guest speaker, as the seasons do not have an overarching theme.

"I try to find somebody who's active in the community, whether they have a job that's community based, they're a part of an organization or politically or something," Woodson said. "I always try to find somebody that has some piece of knowledge to share with everybody."

The show has featured Waco Police Department's Chief of Police Sheryl Victoria, Cha Community owner Jaja Chen, Waco councilwoman Kelly Palmer and others. Their new season will feature the family of Justin Bibles, who was murdered in front of a Red Lobster restaurant in Waco in 2018, and a highlight on the Waco ISD school board.

"My biggest goal for the podcast was to be able to shed light on what's going on in the world," Bledsoe said.

Bledsoe said she thinks people tune out the news because it is negative, but the tragedies that are occurring are the truth, which is why the podcast was originally created. Bledsoe said she was taught that if she brought issues to light, it would be seen as complaining or dramatizing the issue.

"I hope that people will learn to be courageous because a lot of the people that we want to interview sometimes — they're afraid," Bledsoe said. "I hope people learn to stand up and speak for themselves because I know that sometimes it can be hard, especially being a person of color."

This season, Woodson said they are orienting the podcast to the original message it was created for. The podcast can be streamed on Apple Podcast.

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BFSA offers strategies for education during Black History Month

SHELBY PECK
Staff Writer

Throughout Black History Month, the Baylor Black Faculty and Staff Association encourages everyone in the Baylor community to offer their support by attending events such as a walk-through library exhibit and pursuing opportunities to educate themselves.

Dr. Geoffrey Griggs, the association's president and assistant director of multicultural affairs, said even though the calendar may hold special designations such as Black History Month or Hispanic Heritage Month, everyone's history is important. He said individuals should be aware of where they come from and be open to learn about the pasts of others.

"A lot of times we think of specific months and think, 'If I don't identify with this group, this doesn't apply to me,' but these things impact everybody," Griggs said.

He also said the association is planning several events to celebrate Black History Month, and everyone is welcome to join. One of the events, which was held last year as well, includes collaborations with Baylor's Texas Collection and University Archives and Institute for Oral History, Griggs said.

"We're having 'Black History in the Archives.' They have a lot of historical information and pictures from here in Texas and Waco that a lot of people don't know

about," Griggs said.

The event will be held from 3:30 to 5 p.m. on Feb. 23 in Carroll Library. BFSA has been publicizing the event since earlier this year with the hopes of having more people join in on the opportunity to walk through the exhibit.

"It's just a wonderful time for people if they have some time in their day to go check out all of the history they have over in this building," Griggs said.

within the history of Baylor," Cain said. "Their stories are accessible through Baylor's digital libraries with a simple name search or on the Waco History app."

Griggs said the association's other plans this month include events providing educational opportunities for their members and hosting their traditional mixer with the Black Student Coalition.

"We, as an association, are doing things with student

"
We tend to live in our 'Baylor bubble,' but we have so many opportunities to connect with and support organizations.

**Adrienne Cain |
BFSA PRESIDENT-ELECT**

The association's president-elect, Adrienne Cain, said via email that the Institute for Oral History holds interviews conducted with "Baylor pioneers" such as the Rev. Robert Gilbert and Barbara Ann Walker, the first Black Baylor graduates, and Dr. Vivienne Malone-Mayes, the first Black Baylor professor.

"I encourage people to listen to their stories to learn more about their experiences

groups on campus like having those mixers with students so that they can see our faces and know we're here to support them and be a resource to them in whatever they need," Griggs said.

Griggs, who has worked in multicultural affairs at Baylor since 2013, said he assisted Director of Wellness Dominique Hill in creating BFSA a few years ago. Because he was so involved in the



Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Griggs

GATHER 'ROUND Black Faculty and Staff Association encourages the Baylor community to show support. Black History Month shines a light and brings awareness to a culture people might not know.

organization's formation, he was reluctant to accept the presidency; however, he eventually agreed to the position.

"Being able to see it from the ground up has been a memorable experience," Griggs said. "It has provided an avenue for me to have opportunities that I felt didn't exist before."

Griggs said he is also a member of the first cohort for the association's AIM Leadership Collective, a development program for a designated group of faculty and staff that launched in 2021.

"I can't think of many other opportunities we have a space to allow for these individuals to interact," Griggs said. "There's more at Baylor than I knew about."

Griggs also said in his eight years at Baylor prior to his membership in AIM, he had never interacted with some of those who are now in his cohort. While his job with Student Life may not have allowed him to meet faculty and staff from other areas of campus, they were introduced through AIM and BFSA.

"As a Black faculty member, there aren't very many of us

here — and those of us that are here are kind of siloed to our departments and in our research," Cain said. "[The association] has provided a community for me here with people who have a shared experience and are dedicated to making Baylor a place where everyone belongs."

Cain also said she would like to use her role as president-elect to focus on the recruitment and retention of Black faculty, staff and students at Baylor by creating spaces for them to belong and be mentored. Further than that, she said she would also like to strengthen the association's bond with the Waco community.

"We tend to live in our 'Baylor bubble,' but we have so many opportunities to connect with and support organizations and businesses in Waco, as well as provide outreach to school and community centers here in the city," Cain said.

Griggs said anyone who wishes to be involved and support BFSA, especially throughout February, is welcome. He said everyone has room to grow and should embrace whatever opportunities to educate

themselves to the fullest.

"The great thing about [the association] is that we're not limited based on color. We have a lot of people who support our mission and what is driving us to make Baylor a better place," Griggs said. "We love the support and what they bring."

Cain said membership in BFSA is open to any faculty, staff or graduate student who understands the association is "dedicated to the recruitment, retention and needs of Black faculty, staff and students here at Baylor."

To join, they can visit the association's website and pay an annual \$25 membership fee. Membership for graduate students is free for the first year.

"Go and check it out, support, learn and educate yourself, but have a good time," Griggs said. "Know that this is your history as well and an opportunity for you to embrace it to the fullest."

If anyone has questions about membership in the Black Faculty and Staff Association or any of the events being held during Black History Month, they are free to contact bfsa@baylor.edu.

Mark your calendar:

Black History Month events at Baylor, in Waco

JAZZ 'N' STANZAZ

Feb. 5 | 6:30 p.m. | SUB Den | Jazz 'N' Stanzaz is hosted by Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, chartered at Baylor in 1972. This event is an open mic night for people to share a song or a poem in honor of Black History Month.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH WALKING TOUR

Feb. 11 | 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. | Starts at the McLennan County Courthouse and ends on Washington Avenue | Led by the Baylor Institute for Oral History's Adrienne Cain and Dr. Stephen Sloan, the tour will explore local African American history in downtown Waco.

BLACK HISTORY IN THE ARCHIVES

Feb. 23 | 3:30 p.m. | Carroll Library | Attendees will learn more about Black history in Waco through historical photos and more.

ARTIFACT SPOTLIGHTS AND HISTORY EXHIBIT

All month | Mayborn Museum Complex | Artifact Spotlights will be posted on the Mayborn's social media. Inside the museum, there is an African American history and Dust Bowl of the 1930s exhibit that will be displayed throughout February.

There are also online options to celebrate Black History Month and earn CAE credit. From "The Lorraine Hansberry Documentary" to "Miss Juneteenth," students have access to a variety of films and series through Baylor Connect.

Check out the full list of opportunities and events here:



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Choir director shines African spirit, joy on Waco

OLIVIA TURNER

Staff Writer

When attendees walk into First Presbyterian Church Waco as the Angaza choir performs, their eyes and ears are met with harmonic voices joined in song and joyous dancing.

These unique and lively shows are put on by Texas's very first African community choir, the second in the United States, made up of Baylor students and Wacoans.

"Angaza," which means "to shine" or "illuminate" in Swahili, is a fitting name as the group has been gracing Waco with their vibrant dashikis of reds, blues and greens and their spirited performances since last spring.

Not only is the choir different in their looks and sounds, but also in their learning methods, according to director and choreographer Derick Etale, who was born and raised in Rwanda.

As a second-year graduate student and major in church music at Baylor, Etale has choreographed dances for several of the mens' choir performances.

"Back home when you start dancing, everybody just looks at you and follows," Etale said.

He said he uses the same watch-and-follow manner when teaching dances to Angaza members with a call-and-response method when teaching the lyrics of songs. The songs are sung in Bantu, Twi, Swahili Xhosa and isiZulu languages. In his culture, Etale said, song and dance are inseparable.

Etale's goal with methods like these — as opposed to the following of notes and lyrics on

sheet music — was to bring his African cultures to America and to share it with the Waco community.

"Instead of reading a written story, you're telling it how you heard it from someone else," said Plano freshman Sarah Davis, a member of the choir.

Davis said this more raw and emotional way of sharing music is inspired by the Holy Spirit and allows her to experience the full extent of joy felt when using song and dance to praise God.

Davis isn't the only member of the choir affected spiritually by Etale's chosen songs. Monica Malas, a Queens, N.Y., freshman and soloist, said she can feel the same unique joy and celebration when she sings.

"It gives light to a different way of interacting with music," Malas said. "Everything comes together and I definitely do think that African music shows a different side of that joy, of that freedom that Western music doesn't."

In addition to the unique joy Angaza conveys, Malas said the folk songs are also different from Western music because they are based on rhythms and chords often unknown to American audiences.

Though the folk songs Etale selects are often foreign to his audience, he said it is important to preserve them and the language barrier does not stop people from enjoying and connecting with them.

"That is why choirs all over the world sing pieces from Africa, because they have been notated and they are out here in public," Etale said. "They're meant to be performed."



Photo courtesy of Derick Etale

SHINE First Presbyterian Church Waco's Angaza choir was Texas' first African community choir.



Olivia Havre | Photographer

VISUALIZE Dr. Heidi Hornik, chair of the department of art and art history, started a collection of paintings to display Baylor's artistic diversity after seeing this painting by John Singletary.

Alumnus painting sparks Baylor art collection celebrating diversity

OLIVIA TURNER

Staff Writer

It only takes a flame to start a fire. For Dr. Heidi Hornik, chair of the department of art and art history, it only takes a painting to start a collection. Hanging on the wall of her office in the Hooper-Schaefer Fine Arts Center is the painting that started it all.

John Singletary, a 2020 alumnus, painted a single figure bathed in red light and surrounded by a harsh, heavy-stroked darkness as if it were consuming him. In comparison to this thinly rendered background, the man portrayed on the canvas is filled with life, evident through his glowing skin and intense stare. Singletary's former painting instructor, professor Winter Rusiloski, said this manner of contrasting simplicity with detail is what catches the eye of the viewer.

"I think his work has this really nice combination of power and delicateness, which really speaks to the subject that he's addressing," Rusiloski said. "His work centers on the proximity of death and Blackness and the emotion that accompanies that idea. He often contemplates biblical narratives through the lens of his personal identity in both blackness and spirituality."

Rusiloski said Singletary was artistically motivated by his own experiences with racism

as a person of color. Singletary was raised in an interracial household and his father was a civil rights activist. Rusiloski said she appreciates the diversity of students such as Singletary, who bring enlightening conversations to the table, such as what it means to be Black in America. She said Singletary would discuss perspectives on police brutality and the difficulties of walking through a white neighborhood as a Black man.

These "human, spiritual concepts through the lens of a Black man" have often been unrepresented, Rusiloski said.

During his time at Baylor, Singletary received a Pollock-Krasner Grant for his work and an Elizabeth Greenshields Grant after graduation. Since graduating, his works have been displayed in various exhibitions, namely at the Houston Museum of African American Culture. Singletary and his painting "Devil's Pie" have also appeared on the cover of "Time: the Next Generation Leaders" with writer and collector Akwaeke Emezi.

Though Singletary no longer paints and creates at Baylor, his work remains present through Hornik's collection. She said she decided to create a collection of art works from recent alumni like Singletary using donations called "excellence funds," which are

DIVINE NINE from Page 2

"I think the biggest thing is just knowing that you'll always have someone in your corner no matter what," Williams said.

Jalen Harding, a recent alumnus from Chicago, said the brotherhood and participation in his fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, never stops.

"This is a lifetime membership," Harding said. "Once you graduate, continue to embody those objectives that you joined for, be a servant to your community and continue to be a great person."

Harding also said it's comforting to always have a group of people that have his back on campus.

"They always will be there to look out for me," Harding said. "If I need anything, I know I can call on them whether it's personal, with school, or job searches. I just know I can always have people to utilize as resources, as family and as friends."

Kariuki said his membership in Phi Beta Sigma has helped him develop both professionally and personally, which are "instilled in [him] permanently."

New Orleans senior Shelynbria Jackson, president of both Sigma Gamma Rho and the NPHC at Baylor, said she was drawn to the Divine Nine organizations because of the cultural aspects.

"There's deep history rooted in all nine of those organizations," Jackson said. "Being an African American woman, I definitely

resonated with that population solely due to the history and cultural ties [of] the creation of these organizations."

Many of the Divine Nine organizations were founded at Howard University in 1930 at a time when Black students were not allowed to join Greek-letter organizations at white institutions.

Jackson said she wanted to join the NPHC specifically because these organizations were created for minorities.

"We do come from a minority population," Jackson said. "That's literally the reason that our organizations were founded. That's not necessarily something to shy away from."

Jackson explained since the Divine Nine was founded because of political and racial issues, it's important for everyone to embrace their historical foundations.

Williams, Fox and Jackson all said they felt like they were a part of something bigger than them and a network that reaches far beyond the "Baylor bubble."

These women said they're proud to be surrounded by a group of other Black women that are constantly pursuing excellence and the betterment of their sisters.

"We genuinely exist to serve and uplift Black women," Fox said.

Each organization will be hosting events throughout Black History Month. Readers can check Connect to see when and where each is being held.

ART COLLECTION from Page 6

used to meet the needs of the department.

Hornik has dubbed the group of paintings and sculpting works by Singletary and other graduates, "The Chair's Excellence Alumni Collection." These alumni artists are all students of color.

"We're very proud of our alumni and they reflect the diversity of the department," Hornik said.

Though only a few works make up the collection now, Hornik said these are just the beginning of a growing group.

Hornik is not alone in working toward celebrating diversity in the arts at Baylor. The entire art department continues to seek ways to further celebrate Black artists and Black History Month through the College of Arts and Sciences' implementation of a diversity, equity and inclusion committee, Hornik said.

"Attention needs to be spent on diverse cultures, people of color, and so Black History Month is a wonderful time to further talk, discuss and think about how we can all be better at that," Hornik said.

To read about the Black Student Union's presence on campus, scan here:



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English professors emphasize role of Black literature

SARAH WANG

Staff Writer

Just like many other fields to which people of color have contributed, African American writers have had strong impacts in multiple U.S. literary movements.

Black History Month allows citizens to reflect on the past and recognize the role of African American people in U.S. history.

Dr. Ryan Sharp, assistant professor in the English Department with a specialty in African American literature, said understanding how Black writers have contributed to the history of literature and writing is a big question in the literary field.

Writing can have great ideological and political power, judging from the fact that literature participates in many other sorts of movements that people tend to think as being “uniquely American,” Sharp said.

Literature is not just a representation of the history and culture of the particular times; Sharp said it has also shaped the culture and history at the time.

“I don’t think you can talk about the literature of the U.S. without the plurality of voices that have constructed the U.S. both literally and figuratively,” Sharp said. “In that way, I don’t think you could have a complete literary canon without including the contributions of Black writers.”



BOOKSMART Dr. Coretta Pittman, associate English professor, shares the importance of literature in Black history.

According to Dr. Coretta Pittman, associate English professor, African American literature began with the slave narrative.

“I’m encouraged by and fascinated by people who can write in the 19th century and tell a story that many people want to keep silent,” Pittman said. “It’s not just that [Black writers] contribute in terms of content, but they also contribute in terms of participating in the literary field — speaking to and speaking with other authors.”

Sharp said his concern about Black History Month is people

tend to highlight a few Black heroes while there are a multitude of Black writers who have not been emphasized in the same way. He also said he has made it a mission in his life to encourage and inspire people to be engaging with Black literatures.

“It’s nice to acknowledge Black literature, Black history and Black culture in February, but it’s also important to consider Black histories, Black contributions to the U.S.,” Sharp said.

Sharp also said scholars of Black history and literature are regularly asked about the use of studying Black history and literature when February rolls around. He said this is true of other minorities and marginalized communities as well. When their week or month comes, they are asked to similarly defend or persuade of the necessity of their study. Yet few ask questions about the rich history or where the literary works originate from to delve more into the culture’s center, he said.

“It seems those histories’ and literatures’ value is accepted as a given,” Sharp said. “Some might argue that this is because those histories are not allotted a particular week or month, though we might further consider how there is seems to be more to it.”

Pittman said she has mixed feelings on Black History Month; she said she wants Black writers to be highlighted, but on the other hand, she thinks they ought to be highlighted every month.

“I don’t want February to be the only month where people take a moment to read Black writers,” Pittman said.

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