

Musical shares rich story of Jubilee Singers

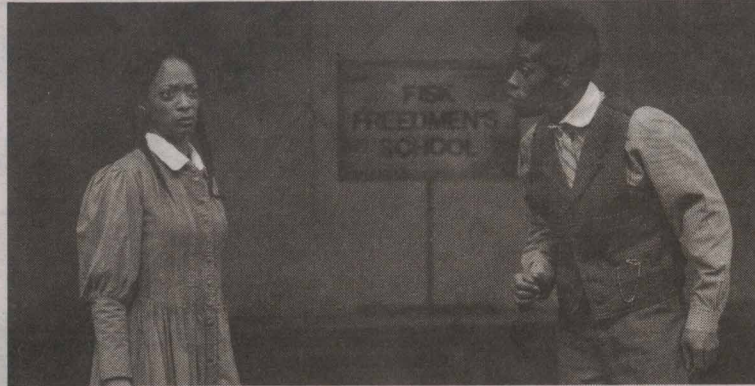
By LINDA ARMSTRONG

Special to the AmNews

Since 1996, a New York-based company called Making Books Sing has been doing something extraordinary: turning books for young readers into musical works for the stage, with very impressive results.

The production they are currently presenting during Black History Month, "A Band of Angels," movingly shares the history of the Jubilee Singers, an all-Black choir formed by freed slaves at Fisk University in 1867 who not only raised money to save the school but went on to become famous and build Jubilee Hall on the University's campus. This production gives the audience a chance to truly experience, enjoy and appreciate our history, as it dramatically comes to life on stage.

The children's book is written by Deborah Hopkinson; the play is powerfully written by Myla Churchill. The production features choreography and direction by Rajendra Ramoon Maharaj, with music direction and arrangements by Linda Twine. "A Band of Angels" tells the story of a present-day girl named Ella (played by Carmen Barika) who is having trouble in school. Twelve-year-old Ella talks in class and is doing poorly in both math and reading; she needs someone to set her straight and realize what an important opportunity getting an education is. She is sent to the home of her Aunt Beth (portrayed by Fredi Walker-Browne), who has a room contain-



Scenes from "A Band of Angels"

(Carol Rosegg photos)

on percussion.

The production I saw in the Bronx at Lehman College was ending the first of three stops it will make in the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn. It played at York College Performing Arts Center, at 94-45 Guy R. Brewer Boulevard in Jamaica, Queens, Feb. 10-12 and will then go to Kingsborough Community College to the Goldstein Theatre, located at 2001 Oriental Boulevard in Brooklyn, Feb. 14-18.

Without a doubt this production is a great show to take the entire family to see. Tickets are \$18. For reservations call 212-573-8791, ext. 242.

Singers. The choir, made of freed slaves, sings only uplifting songs, like "When Johnny Comes Marching Home." When White, a white man, asks the choir to expand its repertoire and sing slave songs, they refuse at first, feeling that slave songs were meant to help them get through one of the most difficult periods in their lives and should not be used for the entertainment of others.

Throughout this production, the audience is treated to the marvelous voices of this very capable cast singing songs like "Balm in Gilead," "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" and "Hambone," among other old



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