Each year Severance Hall has everyone standing to their feet as they sing "We Shall Overcome," which takes a special meaning at the end of the Celebration Concert. After watching this performance each year, you can understand why it sells out.

By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

Each year the Cleveland community breaks down the doors at Severance Hall for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with the Cleveland Orchestra and the Central State Chorus and a Mass Choir

made up of 60 church choirs around Northeast Ohio as they pay honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

A performance that had been sold out for awhile brought politicians, civic leaders, and clergy all together on this special Sunday night at Severance Hall. Now in its 32nd consecutive year, over 2,000 people rejoiced while standing and swaying to the sounds of this great performance in the celebration of the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Cleveland Orchestra and the Greater Cleveland Partnership, in cooperation with the City of Cleveland
, announced the recipients of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Service Awards at Sunday's 32nd annual Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration Concert.

The awards recognized an individual, a youth and a business or organization that have positively impacted Cleveland in the spirit of the teachings and example of Dr. King. Donshon Wilson received the award for an individual, Dontea Gresham received the award honoring a youth, and the YouthAbility Program received the award honoring a business or organization.

A highlight for the event was Conductor Chelsea Tipton II, music director of the Symphony of Southeast Texas, who presided over the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Concert.

This annual free event brings together people of all faiths and nationalities and a few who may have had their first visit Severance Hall. The orchestra also has a pleasant habit of featuring the most recent winner of the annual Spinx Competition, a high-profile contest for young African-American and Hispanic string players. For that one musician who gets to perform at Severance Hall is certainly a career boost like no other.

This year, the Sphinx winner was violinist Alexandra Switala, of Texas, who easily demonstrated with Ravel's "Tzigane," how she came to take first place in the Sphinx's junior division.

All of the songs by the Cleveland Orchestra gave the audience a chance to appreciate the finer sounds of this world-renowned ensemble, in addition the show-stopping spirit of the Celebration Choir. Every year the vocalists.

Each year, the Central State Chorus seem to steal the show. Led by William Henry Caldwell, the Central State Chorus sang such songs like "Don't you let nobody turn you 'round" and the ever vibrant "Precious Lord."

But as impressive as the 70-plus voices of Central State were, the wow factor rose exponentially with the addition of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Chorus. Suddenly, numbers such as "Praise His Holy Name" and "I've been 'buked" took on new church flavor in Severance Hall, as many choir members sang from their seats in the audience.

The highly acclaimed Central State University Chorus, under the direction of William Henry Caldwell, has a repertoire encompassing all periods and styles, including African American spiritual music.

The chorus has performed in the chambers of the House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate, as well as for the Ohio Music Educators Association. The singers have toured over Ohio, the Miami Valley, the East Coast, Midwest and Southeastern U.S. In 1994, the Chorus performed in Washington, D.C. to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The group has performed with Stevie Wonder, Albertina Walker, Tremaine Hawkins, Vaclac Nelhybel, and have presented a tribute concert to famed CSU graduate and operatic diva Leontyne Price, as part of the Central State's Centennial celebration in 1987.

In March of 2001, the Central State University Chorus made its first historic tour of England and France. The chorus had the rare opportunity to perform in several of the world's most historic churches and cathedrals including: Holy Trinity at Stratford-Upon-Avon, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Canterbury Cathedral, the Cathedral of Notre Dame and the American Church in Paris. This March the Central State University Chorus will visit China, another milestone in their school’s history.

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