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***I Have a Voice:* Tennessee's African American Musical Heritage Opens at Beck Cultural Exchange Center**

Knoxville, Tenn. – November 2, 2018 – Beck Cultural Exchange Center presents the exhibition, *I Have a Voice: Tennessee's African American Musical Heritage*, opening November 2, 2018. The exhibition, organized by the Tennessee State Museum, gives a snapshot of Tennessee's rich African American musical heritage and its influence on worldwide musical genres.

The Volunteer State has been the birthplace of some of the most influential music in the world, from the Beale Street blues clubs in Memphis, to the R&B scene on Nashville's Jefferson Street and the jazz in Knoxville's Gem Theatre.



B. B. King, "King of the Blues," by Murray Lee. Image courtesy of Tennessee State Photographic Services.

The history of African American music follows the hardship of slavery in America. American slaves adapted their African ancestors' music to hand clapping, singing, the fiddle and the African-derived banjo.



Bessie Smith, "Empress of the Blues," by Carl Van Vechten, 1936. Image courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Carl Van Vechten Collection.

Expressing their sorrows from bondage, and joy for their ultimate deliverance, these enslaved persons found an original, musical voice sung in their spirituals and folk music. This voice has left a monumental cultural stamp on American music, including blues, ragtime, jazz, gospel, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, and soul music. In turn, this music has influenced and enriched music around the world.

The exhibit introduces viewers to many famous Tennessee music legends — Bessie Smith, who was nicknamed the "Empress of the Blues;" B.B. King, often referred to as the "King of the Blues;" Grand Ole Opry star DeFord Bailey; and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee Tina Turner. The exhibit gives visitors a chance to hear the voices of the many Tennessee African American men and women who made their mark on American music from ragtime to Motown.

Visitors can view YouTube videos of various performers and musicians featured in the exhibition on their smart phones or tablets through the use of QR-coded links.

Educators who are interested in teaching about Tennessee's African American musical heritage will be provided with curriculum-based educational lesson activities.

I Have a Voice: Tennessee's African American Musical Heritage will be on view through Saturday, February 9, 2019.

About the Beck Cultural Exchange Center:

The Beck Cultural Exchange Center was established in 1975 as a primary repository of black history and culture in East Tennessee and remains, "*The Place Where African American History & Culture Are Preserved, Nurtured, Taught, & Continued.*" Absent of Beck, there is no single organization in the region providing this invaluable service. Beck is the storehouse of African American History and Culture and remains dedicated to researching, collecting, and preserving and exhibiting works of art, writings, artifacts, memorabilia, and other evidence of contributions relating to the history and culture of African Americans in this region while fostering and promoting educational, artistic and cultural activities and experiences.

Beck is housed in the heart of the community in an immaculate historic mansion built in 1912 with extension facilities that include a beautiful 5000sf exhibit hall, an intimate 1100sf gallery area and a conference room. Adjacent to the Beck is its newly acquired property, the historic Delaney House. The Delaney House is a restoration project dedicated to preserving the history of world renown artists, brothers Beauford and Joseph Delaney and is part of a larger partnership that support efforts to make the Delaney brothers better known in their hometown.

About the Tennessee State Museum:

The new Tennessee State Museum that sits on the corner of Rosa L. Parks Blvd. and Jefferson Street at Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park can trace its roots back to a museum opened on the Nashville public square in 1817 by a portrait artist, Ralph E.W. Earl. A young boy who visited that museum in 1823 wrote home that he had seen a life-size painting of then General Andrew Jackson. That same painting is now part of the Tennessee State Museum collection.

In 1937 the Tennessee General Assembly created a state museum to consolidate World War I mementoes and other collections from the state, the Tennessee Historical Society and other groups. This museum was located in the lower level of the War Memorial Building until it was moved into the new James K. Polk Center in 1981. It remained there for more than 35 years until, in 2015, Gov. Bill Haslam proposed a new home for the museum on the northwest corner of the Bicentennial Mall in Nashville. The Tennessee General Assembly appropriated \$120 million to build the Museum, with the additional funding to complete the project to be raised in private contributions.

The new Tennessee State Museum, encompassing 137,000 sq. ft. of administration and gallery space, opened to the public on October 4, 2018. Learn more tnmuseum.org.

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