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The Hallelujah Singers

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Island Gullah culture. Organized as a vocal ensemble by Marlena Smalls in 1990 and based in Beaufort, the group promotes Gullah culture through song, story, dance, and dramatic performance.

The Hallelujah Singers present many of the unique customs and rituals that are an integral part of Gullah life. Drawing on extensive research, including interviews with seniors in the community, Smalls and the group have developed programs that combine storytelling and Gullah music—a music form steeped in a rich African American spiritual tradition. They have three professional recordings: *Gullah: Songs of Hope, Faith, and Freedom* (1997); *Joy: A Gullah Christmas* (1998); and *Gullah: Carry Me Home* (1999). The Hallelujah Singers also travel extensively throughout the United States, presenting their “Fa Da Chillun” outreach program to students and adults. Movie audiences became familiar with the group from their appearance in the motion picture *Forrest Gump*, with Marlena Smalls appearing in the role of “Bubba’s Mama.” The Hallelujah Singers have also appeared in several national media outlets and continue to broaden their audience base.

Marlena Smalls and the Hallelujah Singers have been recognized for their commitment to the presentation and advocacy of Gullah culture. As a part of its bicentennial celebration, the Library of Congress designated the Hallelujah Singers a “Local Legacy of South Carolina.” Other awards include the Jean Laney Harris Folk Heritage Award, the Alpha Kappa Community Service Award, and selection as the South Carolina Ambassadors of the Year for 1998.

SADDLER TAYLOR

Hallelujah Singers, The. Hallelujah Singers are a nationally recognized performance troupe offering unique cultural programming by preserving, performing, and celebrating the rich heritage of Sea