

Interfaith Concert in Brooklyn Honors First Responders at 9/11

Bruce Grodner
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An unprecedented concert joined interfaith leaders, lawmakers, and Ground Zero first responders at a reggae music hall in Brooklyn on the eve of 9/11.

The “Interfaith Concert – The Reunion of Abrahamic Family,” which took place on September 9, 2012 in Brooklyn, NY, was sponsored by the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) and the Unification Church. First responders of 9/11 were recognized at the event not only by New York politicians, including Senator John Sampson of District 19 from Brooklyn and Representative Mathieu Eugene of New York City Council District 40, but also local ministers of the Abrahamic family. Music from the diverse Brooklyn community enlivened the event.



Despite the sudden death of Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, the founder of the aforementioned sponsors, as well as the likelihood of cancellation, the Interfaith Concert resulted in a wonderful evening of entertainment, recognition, appreciation, and commemoration of Rev. Moon, who had dedicated his life

towards substantiating a world of peace. The unexpected news brought a sense of unity among the participants. Both Senator Sampson and Representative Eugene gave tremendous support and acknowledgement for the vision and sincerely praised the purpose of this gathering.



Reverend Bruce Grodner, District Pastor of the Unification Church in New York and the co-chairman of New York State ACLC, highlighted, “It was a great honor to recognize John Ruiz, a New York City firefighter who received a plaque to honor all firefighters and especially those who made the ultimate sacrifice at Ground Zero, and Roosevelt Rose, a community activist and district leader that has made a difference in the quality of life for all. A special shout out was given to Chaplain Marcus Knight as a first responder who helped many at the World Trade Tower.”

The concert began with Ambassador Denroy Morgan, reggae artist and visionary, and Rev. Grodner, who welcomed over a hundred guests, supporters, and sponsors. Everyone enjoyed a wonderful blend of art, reggae-, gospel-, hip-hop-, and spiritual music. A DJ from The 12 Tribes of Israel Orthodox Selection provided additional music. Performing artists included Pastor Glenda Phillips-Lee, Evangelist Eleanor Riley, Nyabinghi Drummers, Rockazion Band, Bishop Salanch Lewis and Band, Ianbassa Band and Denroy Morgan and the Anthem Band.



The audience viewed a documentary on Rev. Moon’s work of reconciliation in the Middle East, where nearly 50 pilgrimages under the banner of Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) have taken place to help bring the Abrahamic family together. In addition to the film, three speakers gave insight into this process: Joseph Alpert represented Judaism as an Orthodox Jew, Reggae Artist Bishop Cecil G. Riley represented the Christian view, and Shayqasm Muhammed shared from the Muslim perspective. Each of the three spoke deeply, and the audience felt the similarities and heart from the speakers, who have all walked their

own paths of reconciliation.

Dr. Michael Jenkins, chairman of ACLC, introduced a beautiful water ceremony whereby Holy Water from each of the three traditions was mingled, including special Holy Water from the Church of Axum Zion, the Guardian over the Ark of the Covenant in Ethiopia where Emperor Haile Selassie, the first King Rastafari, reined. Each poured the Holy Water from their faith tradition into a large bowl symbolizing their unity and together, they poured this collective Holy Water on the roots of a tree that will be planted as a symbol of giving life through their unity. This ceremony set the stage for a short tribute to Rev. Moon conducted by Dr. Jenkins. Dr. Kennard Davis from the Truth Center for Higher Consciousness offered a prayer that recognized Rev. Moon's lifelong devotion to God and the building of His Kingdom was given by. The audience then joined together for a moment of silent prayer and meditation.



A number of the entertainers said that this concert is just the beginning of many more to come. Alpert said he was very moved by the interfaith participation at the concert and mentioned his determination to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the young people through music. He said, "Both life and death can be conveyed by the words through music. We must win this cultural war using powerful music with lyrics that share thoughts and feelings that generate love and value the family. It is a war, and concerts like this can capture hearts and minds in a positive way."



Dr. Roy Hastick, founder and CEO of Caribbean American Chamber of Commerce (CACCI), who endorsed this event, was unable to attend due to health issues. Dr. Hastick sent a greeting and expressed his continued support for the important work that is being done. His words were read by Bishop Cecil G. Riley, senior pastor of Freedom Hall Church of God, who later went on to give a very powerful message from the Christian perspective.

Wesley Benjamin was the Master of Ceremonies of the event. George Cooks, the owner of the reggae music hall Pulse 48, and production engineers David Eaton, Marvin Cintron, Lucas Tecun, and Peter Lewis used their skills to facilitate the events. Unification Church pastor in New York City Andrew Love and his team directed the front of house Caribbean style. According to Rev. Grodner, food was lovingly prepared to perfection.