**NEWS**

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UTM INSTRUCTOR SHOWS DOCUMENTARY IN NASHVILLE

MARTIN – Henri Giles presented her documentary “Waiting in the Wings: African-Americans in Country Music” on June 7 at the National Museum of African-American Music in Nashville as part the lead-up to the Country Music Association Festival.

“It was great. It was really nice,” she said. “We had a good crowd and a good reception to it, good questions.

“It was not part of the formal CMA Fest, but in Nashville leading up to the CMA Fest, there are a lot of events. While this was not an official part of CMA Fest, this was an event that the museum put on to capture what was going on in the city.”

The National Museum of African-American Music (NMAAM) is celebrating Black Music Month throughout the month of June.

Giles, an instructor in the UTM Department of Mass Media and Strategic Communication, produced “Waiting in the Wings” in 2004, featuring the history of country music through the African-American perspective, starting with its roots in African slavery and moving to the 21st century.

Giles said the National Museum of African-American Music is across the street from Ryman Auditorium, one of the historical standout venues for country music.

“It is a wonderful facility that captures a lot of the different forms of Black music,” she said. “It’s a great facility.”

Giles’ documentary was originally produced to be seen on CMT – Country Music Television – in 2004. The documentary also features Ray Charles, Charley Pride, Hank Williams Jr., Naomi Judd and Marty Stuart.

 It won a Telly Award and a National Association of Black Journalists award.

“There has been a lot of interest in the film since then,” she said. “We’ll get calls from people who want to screen it or to even use it as part of research.

“I had a Ph.D. student contact me a couple of years ago because she was doing research about African-Americans in country music.”

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Giles said that someone familiar with “Waiting in the Wings” reached out to her to have it presented at NMAAM.

“This was someone who was familiar with the project and thought it would be a perfect fit for CMA Fest,” she said. “Someone approached us and they got in contact with the museum. The museum and this person worked together to make it happen.

“The staff at the museum, they were incredible. They could not have been more gracious.”

The film was shown at 2 p.m. at NMAAM, so Giles did not expect a big crowd, but it did bring in 50 to 80 people.

“We were hoping for a good crowd, but I think the number really exceeded what we thought,” she said. “There was a group of young people there who happened to be visiting from Louisiana. It was a school group, and they really enjoyed the film.”

Giles said the documentary captures the contributions that African-Americans have made to country music.

“Traditionally, people tend to think that country music isn’t a form of music that Blacks listen to or have anything to do with,” she said. “But when you look at the history of the genre, nothing could be further from the truth. You can look at instruments like the banjo, which has its origins in Africa.

“Our film touches on that, how music was brought to this country by enslaved people. As the music developed here, some of those African roots remained in this music.”

Giles said some of the people in attendance at the film showing came up to her in surprise.

“They said, ‘I had no idea that Black people were involved in country music,’” she said. “Now, we see this interest in country music and we are seeing different artists who are making strides.

“In the film, we showcase different people who are, at the time, trying to build their careers in country music, and some of them have had quite a bit of success. One of those is Rissi Palmer. She is doing really well now. She had some partnerships with CMT, she has a podcast on Apple and she had a single that was released a few weeks ago that is doing well on the country charts.”

Giles said “Waiting in the Wings” is a lesson in showing the struggle that began in country music years ago as African-Americans tried to make their mark in the genre.

“I always describe myself as a storyteller,” she said. “I feel that there are so many pieces to life that we don’t know about. I think if people can know and understand these different nuances and culture, I think that will help them understand each other a little bit better.”

Giles is pursuing a Ph.D. in mass media and rhetoric at the University of Memphis.

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Photo ID GILES AT NMAAM – Sharing the stage June 7 at the National Museum of African American Music are (from left) NMAAM Community Engagement Manager Byron Howard, who moderated the discussion; Karla Winfrey, a longtime friend and business partner of Henri Giles who co-created and produced the documentary; and Giles.

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