

Singing From the Heart

Written by Alaina Lewis



When it comes to mental health struggles, African Americans too often avoid conversation of a paralyzing issue such as depression. As natural as it is for many of us to be plagued by the blues, for some it's easier to try and ignore the fire, than it is to find a way out of the flames.

For mega star Jennifer Holliday, famed for her Tony Award winning portrayal of Effie in the Broadway musical *Dream Girls*, depression was a 10-year reality that refused to simmer out softly under the planks of her career.

"I suffered for many years from chronic depression," Holliday shared with *Insight News*. "I was diagnosed with clinical depression after I tried to commit suicide in 1990. Many years before I was diagnosed, I had gone without help; suffering in silence, and mainly because back in the early 80s people in the entertainment industry didn't talk about depression. It just wasn't sexy to talk about mental health problems."

People sometimes assume that artists are superhuman or that their fame should supersede their problems when it comes to catching a case of the continual blues. "A lot of people attribute my suffering to the fact that I'm an artist or an entertainer, and that it should be expected that I'm moody," she said. "You're expected to get over it because the main thing is to get on that stage and sing no matter what it takes. I think it's so much more excusable for people to be an alcoholic or a drug user because folks say, 'That's okay, you know they have so much pressure,' than it is to battle the problem by getting help for depression."

Like a rainbow trapped in midnight, Holliday eventually found the light of day out of her battle with chronic unhappiness. Her story, which she's been sharing with the world since she became a mental health advocate in 1995, delivers a timely message, spawning from her desire to fix a problem before the life within the ailment ceases to exist. "After the beautiful jazz singer Phyllis Hyman took her life in 1995 on her birthday, I'd had enough. I wanted to let people know that they don't have to suffer alone. There's help, and they should try and reach out and get it, no matter what is involved with the stigma," she delivers.

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Putting her voice where her heart is, On June 10, Holliday is teaming up with the Peoples Incorporated Mental Health Services here in the Twin Cities to host a luncheon. “*Singing From the Heart*,” will be an intimate afternoon with Holliday, filled with candid stories, inspiring music, and personal experiences that will serve as a platform to encourage individuals seeking and/or working towards overcoming their battle with depression, to get that needed help.

P.I.M.H.S. has been serving the Twin Cities for over 40 years, helping to reshape the voids in the lives of people in the community at large. Through their 41 different programs, they’re successfully able to aid families in crisis, provide necessary help for the homeless, and lead individuals suffering from various mental health problems in the right direction to attaining a fresh start.

Holliday, who also suffers from Multiple Sclerosis, is at a point in her life where she can embrace the dark spots that have finally lead her towards an unconditional inner happiness. When she’s not fighting for Mental Health awareness, or working with various MS foundations, she’s mentoring young girls and women nationally and in her community, in an effort to counter the potential problems that come with the challenges of life. Challenges that if left untreated can lead to the depression, Holliday and many others have suffered.

“I want to start early with girls understanding their self-worth, and learning how they can begin to feel good about themselves no matter what size they are. When I first lost weight, I found out that I still had the same problems. I was walking around at a size 8 and was still messed up. I still had the same issues, and the same problems because I never did any inner work. I almost wanted to run and put the weight back on, because that was my only familiarity, that not only I knew, but the people around me knew,” she offers. “My thing is, I don’t want people to look at me for the outside, but rather the inside. That’s what I want to teach young women. We need to overcome being in a society that’s more comfortable teaching dysfunction, than being normal.”

June 10th at the Midland Hills Country Club, will be an afternoon to remember and an event that will be a turning point in the lives of many who are present. The event is open to the public, and attendance is encouraged and welcomed by anyone who is ready to open their heart to hear an inspirational message from someone who has personally lived their cause.

You don’t have to walk a mile in someone’s shoes, to understand the wealth that exists in their journey. Holliday’s tale is in an unforgettable one, and in finding that comfort in her triumphs and challenges, is what has brought her closer to the public, even apart from utilizing the musical notes that originally forged her into stardom.

With a new studio album underway, and her current life engulfed in happiness and a heart for assisting world change, the beauty in her story continues, so you don’t want to miss the telling of the first half.

For more information on this event, please visit www.Peopleincorporated.org Tickets are \$30.