



PERFORMER PROFILE

James Sterrett-Bryant – Sharing His Gifts

James Sterrett-Bryant, a 64-year-old Air Force veteran from Palmdale, Calif., is an award-winning vocalist who has overcome numerous challenges to attend the 2006 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in Rapid City, S.D. With a melodic baritone voice that has serenaded audiences all over the country, Sterrett-Bryant remains humble about his impressive talents and appreciates the opportunity to share them with the communities hosting this annual national program for America's veterans.

Sterrett-Bryant has competed nationally in the Creative Arts Festival six times, earning an invitation to attend each time. He believes that the Festival program has helped him with his confidence and self-esteem. "The arts present us with the opportunity to showcase our abilities," he said. "We, as veterans and disabled veterans, tend to be dismissed by society but the Festival is a way to show the country that we have valuable skills and talents that contribute to the community. It is our responsibility to share our gifts."

This year, Sterrett-Bryant was recognized in two categories in the national music competition, first place in the vocal group (Broadway) category as well as high honors in the vocal solo (classical) category. At the Festival, he will perform a vocal duet from the *Phantom of the Opera* entitled, "All I Ask of You."

Joining the Air Force in his early twenties, Sterrett Bryant served from 1964–68, working in aircraft control and warning. A serious automobile accident in 1983 resulted in a number of physical challenges including incomplete quadriplegia, the inability to walk or stand for long periods of time, partial paralysis to his stomach muscles and diaphragm, and partial paralysis to the left side of his larynx. Told that the injuries would leave him totally dependent for the rest of his life, he thought he had lost a life-long gift in vocal music. Singing was a significant and rewarding pursuit prior to his paralyzing accident, so the nature of his disability was especially discouraging.

With encouragement from his VA therapist at the medical facility in Sepulveda, Calif., as well as his vocal coach and the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, Sterrett-Bryant learned that returning to his musical roots was actually therapeutic. "The art of singing has a healing energy," he said. "In my case, singing helped restore the elasticity to the left side of my larynx and helped control my breathing more than physical exercise." In a very real sense, singing became his therapy, bringing improved flexibility and function to his larynx and enabling him to control and regulate his breathing. For James Sterrett-Bryant, singing has proven to be a miracle, first as a therapy and second in restoring the musical gift he thought was lost forever.