

Critical Mass

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Fantasia gives gospel performance



Two artists associated with Oprah's presentation of *The Color Purple* returned to their gospel roots Sunday in brief appearances at Bethel AME.

Fantasia, the *American Idol* winner turned pop singer turned stage actor who portrayed Celie in the *Color Purple* on Broadway, brought the capacity crowd at the 11:30 a.m. service to their feet with "Jesus Be a Fence Around Me," and "The Lord Is Blessing Me Right Now," two traditional gospel songs most churches and choirs know.

A red-haired Fantasia made a point to tell the audience about how gospel is still a part of her life. Her grandmother and mother, who were with her at Bethel, are ministers.

"Most of you know I'm a church girl," she said to the capacity audience at the church on Druid Hill. "Every now and then I have to give some praise."

The church influence was evident, from her "holy" dance to the way she directed Bethel's all-women's choir with the sound of her voice. She often walked up and down the church aisles to engage audience members around her.

In the 8 a.m. service, Jeannette Bayardelle, the actress who plays Celie in the touring production of *Color Purple*, sang two songs, one contemporary gospel song and "I'm Here," a song from the production, which is currently playing at the Hippodrome Theatre through Sunday.

Bayardelle, who grew up singing in a church choir, released her debut CD, entitled *Praise Report*, in September 2005.

(Photo from Sunday's performance by Steve Ruark / Special to The Sun)