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THE MANN LAUNCHES THE PHILADELPHIA FREEDOM FESTIVAL CELEBRATING THE LEGACY OF PHILADELPHIA FREEDOM FIGHTER OCTAVIUS V. CATTO

Seven-Month Series of Events Unites City's Major Arts, Civic & Community Organizations in Presenting Original Programming for All Ages; Festival Culminates in Performance by Philadelphia Orchestra with Award-Winning Gospel Artist, Dr. Marvin Sapp



PHILADELPHIA (Jan. 15, 2014) – An exhilarating array of original, artistic programming will link the arts with civil rights history as the Mann mounts the Philadelphia Freedom Festival, beginning in February. The Philadelphia Freedom Festival is a seven-month endeavor to commemorate the life and legacy of Octavius V. Catto, a 19th-century Philadelphian and African-American civil rights pioneer who was a tireless advocate for equality in the city and the nation.

The imaginative series of nine events is under the direction of Nolan Williams, Jr., one of the country's foremost producers of inspirational arts programming, and Rhoda Blount, Project Director for the Festival and Vice President of Education and Community Outreach for the Mann. Williams' work has been performed at the White House, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and by the National Symphony Orchestra.

The Festival events include in-school participatory workshops, a master class with commissioned composer and Philadelphia native Uri Caine, an old-fashioned spiritual revival with blended voices from the local church community, a spoken word performance, scholarly panel discussions, engaging youth performances, and a celebration honoring some of Philadelphia's leading African-American women. The culmination of this groundbreaking festival is a concert on the main stage at the Mann featuring award-winning gospel artist Dr. Marvin Sapp, a 300-voice gospel choir, and the premiere of Caine's original orchestral composition inspired by the life of Catto to be performed by The Philadelphia Orchestra. Several of the events will be free and open to the public. (Please see schedule below.)

Unprecedented Partnerships & Programming

"Presenting a major curatorial festival of this nature is central to the strategic vision of the Mann as it reflects the commitment of our board to this caliber of unprecedented programming," said Catherine M. Cahill, President and CEO of the Mann. "The Philadelphia Freedom Festival blends the Mann's core values of community focus and artistic excellence, and we couldn't be more thrilled by the level of support and collaboration we have received across the city."

Supported by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage and The Presser Foundation, with additional support from The Lomax Family Foundation, the Philadelphia Freedom Festival will collaborate with partners from cultural, educational, and ecumenical institutions to provide programs and activities inspired by the rich diversity of Catto's life. Program partners include The Philadelphia Orchestra, the African American Museum of Philadelphia, Art Sanctuary, the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Curtis Institute of Music, History Making Productions, Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, Temple University Press, The Union League of Philadelphia, 900-AM WURD with additional support from the Mayor's Office of Faith Based Initiatives.

"We are thrilled to be a key partner with the Mann Center in this important project that honors Octavius Catto, serves Philadelphia, and leverages the arts to raise awareness around issues of equality," said Allison Vulgamore, President and CEO of The Philadelphia Orchestra. "Premiering Uri Caine's commissioned piece will be an honor, and we look forward with eagerness to working with all partners in the community to bring this to fruition. Our thanks to Cathy Cahill for her vision and leadership in bringing us together to celebrate this Philadelphia hero."



Dr. Marvin Sapp



Nolan Williams, Jr.



Uri Caine

Philadelphia Champion for Civil Rights

"There is so much to celebrate! 2013 saw the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Washington and the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, and 2014 marks the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act," said Blount. "What's lesser known is that a Philadelphian named Octavius V. Catto was central to the early civil rights movement that paved the way for these significant achievements. Through the work and the reach of the Philadelphia Freedom Festival, we will bring his important story to life through music, dance and many other forms of expression in a way that is accessible and engaging."

The Octavius V. Catto story is one of intellect, strength, courage, and conviction. He sat down for equal rights on public transportation, stepped up to bat for equal opportunities in baseball, and eventually gave his life in his fight for civil rights. Born in Charleston, S.C. in 1839, Catto settled in Philadelphia with his family in 1850. A well-educated man with a dedication to learning, he graduated valedictorian from the Institute for Colored Youth, now Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. Catto was insistent on the equality of all men and became a leader of local and national prominence for enfranchisement and civil rights for African Americans. He worked alongside other black leaders, including Frederick Douglas, to fight for equality. On Election Day, Oct. 10, 1871, Catto was murdered on his doorsteps for his efforts. He remains an important figure in early civil rights history for both the region and the nation. In fact, later this year, as part of the Festival celebration, Catto's will be the first installation of a statue commemorating an African American in the city of Philadelphia.

A Festival for a Freedom Fighter

The schedule for the Philadelphia Freedom Festival is as follows:

Octavius Catto Story: A Philadelphia Freedom Fighter

Feb.-Apr. 2014

In observance of Black History Month, the Mann's Connecting Arts-N-Schools program will present workshops and performances at four Philadelphia schools. The programs will feature the Rock School for Dance Education's "Catto at the Bat" ballet and Negro Spiritual sing-a-longs with teaching artist Barbara Walker.

Let Freedom Sing

Feb. 22, 2014

Catto Community Jubilee

2 – 4 p.m.

Gospel choirs from across the city will join together to celebrate Catto's 175th birthday with an all-Negro Spiritual Church Meeting at Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church.

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Taste of Freedom

March 28, 2014

Catto Awards Luncheon

11:30p.m. – 2:30p.m.

In celebration of Women's History Month, the luncheon will recognize and honor African-American women, who have made distinguished contributions to their professions and communities. The event will be held at the Union League of Philadelphia.

Honorees:

Performing Arts: Joan Myers Brown, Founder, The Philadelphia Dance Company (PHILADANCO) and the Philadelphia School of Dance Arts

Government: Hon. Augusta Clark, Retired City Council (awarded posthumously)

Media: Trudy Haynes, Retired CBS Broadcast Pioneer

Literature: Sonia Sanchez, Poet, Playwright, Educator and Activist

Business: Beverly A. Harper, Founder & President, Portfolio Associates

Medicine: Dr. Edith Mitchell, Professor of Medicine and Medical Oncology, Thomas Jefferson University

Tourism: Wanda Paul, Senior VP, Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau

Education: Jacquelyn Kelley, CEO, Discovery Charter School

Senator Roxanne Jones Award: Lucinda Hudson, President, Parkside Association

Freedom of Composition

April 18, 2014

A Master Class with Uri Caine

2 – 4 p.m.

This master class and meet-the-composer session will be facilitated by Uri Caine, Philadelphia native and commissioned composer of the Mann concert with the Philadelphia Orchestra and award-winning Gospel artist, Dr. Marvin Sapp. College students from music programs across the city will be invited to participate at the class hosted by Curtis Institute.

Let Freedom Ring

April 30, 2014

Scholarly Panel Discussion

4 – 6 p.m.

Live broadcast by 900AM-WURD, hosted by Temple University in Mitten Hall, this engaging discussion joins a diverse set of voices from Philadelphia's academic and activist communities to reflect on the life and impact of Octavius V. Catto. Performance by Cheyney University Concert Choir.

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Panelists:

Dan Biddle & Murray Dubin, Co-Authors "Tasting Freedom"

*Keith Bingham, Archivist, Cheyney University,
Mahlon Duckett, Player, Negro League Baseball,
Charles L. Blockson, African American Historian
Mel Dorn, Karen Jordan, & Dr. John E. Churchville, Local Civil Rights Leaders
Nolan Williams, Jr., Artistic Festival Director*

Let Freedom Speak: Voices of our Children

Catto Youth Freedom Project

This event for an estimated 400 Philadelphia students, in partnership with Art Sanctuary's Celebration of Black Writing, will feature student spoken word and choir performances.

May 16, 2014

10 a.m. – 12 noon

Freedom RAP Session

Youth Freedom Panel Discussion

Hosted at the Mann in the Crescendo Tent in partnership with Art Sanctuary, this event will include performances by young, emerging spoken word artists and will feature a discussion among local hip-hop artists and scholars about the power of music to reflect their experiences with and perspectives on racism.

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

June 7, 2014

10 a.m. – 12 noon

Sing Freedom Sing

Main Stage Concert at the Mann

The premier event of the festival, this concert will feature special guest artist Dr. Marvin Sapp along with the Philadelphia Orchestra, a 300-voice choir, headline soloists, and praise dancers. The concert will also feature the original composition of Philadelphia native Uri Cane, commissioned for the 2014 Philadelphia Freedom Festival. Pre-concert event on PECO Plaza featuring the "Trailblazers to Freedom Digital Interactive Media Traveling Trunk", Catto re-enactor Robert Branch, and Enon Children's Choir.

July 19, 2014

8 – 10 p.m.

Freedom Youth Jamboree

Young People's Concert Series

A free summer children's concert featuring the Rock School of Dance Education performing "Catto at the Bat," a classical baseball ballet on pointe, and the Philadelphia Boys Choir performing Negro Spirituals and traditional Gospel music.

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

July 29, 2014

11 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

For more information on the Mann's Philadelphia Freedom Festival and schedule of events, please visit www.manncenter.org/philadelphia-freedom-festival.

Editor's Note: Digital photos of all major participants available upon request.

Related Events & Organizations:

Octavius V. Catto Memorial Fund

The re-emergence of Octavius V. Catto as an extraordinarily important figure in Philadelphia's 19th-century history, and indeed in the history of the nation's civil rights movement, motivated the creation of the Octavius V. Catto Memorial Fund. The principal purpose of the Fund is to erect a permanent memorial in Catto's honor, befitting the stature of one of the city's greatest citizens. The memorial will be erected on the southwest apron of City Hall where Catto can be seen alongside other historical figures. The Catto statue will be the only public work of art in the City of Philadelphia dedicated to a sole African American.

(www.civilwarphilly.net/cattomemorial)

The Politics of the Pythians

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

April 3, 2014

6 – 7:30 p.m.

The Pythians black baseball team in Philadelphia had its first full season here in 1867, under field captain and shortstop, educator and activist Octavius Catto. The Pythians' story is about more than just baseball. Their ballgames spawned social gatherings, and it was here that players and their supporters discussed segregation and voting rights. This lecture will be presented by Jerrold Casway, Ph.D., Dean of Social Sciences and Teacher Education at Howard Community College (Columbia, Md.). To register, visit www.hsp.org/calendar or call 215-732-6200, ext. 227.

About the Mann

The Mann Center for the Performing Arts' Education & Community Engagement Program is the region's largest free education program, impacting more than 50,000 young people annually and more than 400,000 since 1997. The Mann's Connecting Arts-N-Schools program offers city-wide schools a wide array of multicultural performances in music, theater and dance. This gives thousands of students the opportunity to experience the sights, sounds and rhythms of live performances – often for the very first time.

As one of the most important outdoor music centers in the country, the Mann Center for the Performing Arts presents top artists in a world-class, entertainment destination in association with AEG Live and Princeton Entertainment. Each summer season, renowned symphony orchestras, iconic rock stars and the latest touring artists in indie rock, hip hop, R&B and pop take the stage here, and today's success is a nod to the venue's storied history. The Mann has been the summer home of The Philadelphia Orchestra since the 1930s and presented critically acclaimed performers in every decade since then. Located in the heart of Philadelphia's Fairmount Park, the Mann hosts more than 170,000 visitors annually. Signature concert experiences are surrounded by Philadelphia's stunning nighttime skyline and include seats beneath the Mann's magnificent shed; picnics, blankets and music under the stars on its famous lawn; and dining in Crescendo, the venue's spectacular tented restaurant. For more information, visit www.manncenter.org.

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