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## **History brought alive musically at Underground Railroad site**

*A dramatic episode in Philadelphia history brought to life through music and performed in Philadelphia's only intact, accessible stop on the Underground Railroad*

Philadelphia, PA February 7, 2013 – Imagine the fear that gripped the inhabitants of the Johnson House when federal marshals came looking for escaped slaves travelling along the Underground Railroad. On Sunday, February 24, 2013, the public will experience the powerful story of just such a moment in history. **Commonwealth Youthchoirs** will host three performances of ***The Good Raised Up: A Story of Community, Integrity, and the Road to Freedom.*** The choral work will be performed by young singers from Keystone State Boychoir, Pennsylvania Girlchoir and *Find Your Instrument!* Choir. The performances, at 2:00, 2:45, and 3:30 pm, are made possible by support from **PNC Arts Alive**, and admission is free. Johnson House is located at 6303 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia.

*The Good Raised Up*, commissioned by Commonwealth Youthchoirs and created by two acclaimed Philadelphia artists, storyteller Charlotte Blake Alston and jazz violinist John Blake, Jr., is an original “sung story” premiered by the choirs at Johnson House in 2012. *The Good Raised Up* is a dramatic composition for treble chorus, violin, percussion, piano and several narrators, and recounts a night in the 1850s when a Quaker family in Germantown protected a group of escaped slaves from capture by a band of federal marshals.

The commission offered these talented siblings a rare chance to work together. **John Blake, Jr.** has been one of the world’s leading jazz violinists for over four decades. He has received numerous awards and prizes and is also an accomplished composer, arranger, author, teacher and lecturer. **Charlotte Blake Alston** is a nationally renowned storyteller, narrator, instrumentalist and singer who performs in venues throughout North America and abroad.

In writing the libretto, Alston said, "The first challenge was documenting the authenticity of the story, as it was passed down orally." An interesting discovery, she adds, "was that Quakers who participated in hiding runaways had to consider that not being truthful to federal marshals or slave catchers seeking runaways was against the very tenets of Quakerism. In claiming 'There are no slaves here,' they stood by their belief - there are PEOPLE here, but no slaves." In creating the music to complement his sister's text, composer Blake joined the power of jazz composition with the medium of children's choral music in giving voice to this moment in history.

"When we first heard the story of what happened that night at the Johnson House, it caught our imagination. We knew we had to find a way to bring it to life musically," said **Susan Ashbaker, Executive Director of Commonwealth Youthchoirs.** As plans for the commission and the accompanying festival took shape, Commonwealth Youthchoirs was awarded a generous grant from PNC Arts Alive to make the festival possible.

**PNC Arts Alive** is a five-year, \$5 million investment from The PNC Foundation that supports visual and performing arts groups with the goal of increasing arts access and engagement. “The PNC Foundation has a long history of providing grants to non-profit organizations that strengthen and enrich the lives of our neighbors,” said Bill Mills, regional president of PNC for Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey. “We understand the valuable return that investing in the arts can deliver. Today more than ever, the businesses we attract, the jobs we create and the visitors who extend their stay are drawn by what the Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey region has to offer.” For more information on PNC Arts Alive and the grant recipients visit [www.PNCARTSALIVE.com](http://www.PNCARTSALIVE.com).

**Keystone State Boychoir** (KSB) has sung with the region’s most distinguished ensembles, and has performed internationally on all seven continents. **Pennsylvania Girlchoir** (PG) maintains a repertoire steeped in the classical tradition and enhanced by music from many cultures and time periods. ***Find Your Instrument!*** (FYI!) is a choral outreach program of Commonwealth Youthchoirs at the John Wister Elementary School in Germantown which seeks to bring choral music education to students who otherwise would not have such an opportunity.

Learn more about *The Good Raised Up* online at [TheGoodRaisedUp.org](http://TheGoodRaisedUp.org).

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If you'd like more information about this event, please call Susan Ashbaker at 267-408-0027 or e-mail Susan at [sashbaker@cychoirs.org](mailto:sashbaker@cychoirs.org)