



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VOICES OF ZION, an Immersive Music-Theatre Experience
In Observance of the 160th DC Emancipation Day

Giving Voice to the Ancestors in the Oldest Black Cemeteries in Washington, DC

- *Special Premiere Performance at THEARC, Saturday April 16th -*

(Washington, DC) The Mt Zion – Female Union Band Historic Memorial Park is pleased to announce in partnership with **Alliance for New Music Theatre**, an original work and immersive music-theatre experience – ***VOICES OF ZION***. The production is created to help commemorate the 160th anniversary of District of Columbia Compensated Emancipation Act -- signed by President Abraham Lincoln on *April 16, 1862*, that freed enslaved people in the District of Columbia. ***VOICES OF ZION*** is a story based on the 19th century history of Georgetown using the stories of the real lives of African Americans to illustrate the complexities of American history and urban slavery. Georgetown was the first neighborhood in newly created Washington, DC and was comprised of free, enslaved, and *freed* African Americans, who lived, worked, and worshipped together.

“Voices of Zion also exposes the divisions within the Methodist Church and indeed throughout America - between abolitionists and segregationists, slave owners and those enslaved, and between Union and Confederate sympathizers. The characters selected share a common goal: to see the cemeteries preserved as a monument to their lives and legacies, a resting place of dignity for themselves and their contemporaries. They shine a light on the urgency that Black cemeteries face here and elsewhere, sacred sites that continue to be forgotten, lost, and desecrated through erosion, ignorance, and development plans,” says Lisa Fager, Executive Director, Mt Zion – FUBS Historic Memorial Park.

To tell this story, ***VOICES OF ZION*** brings together some of the area’s most talented professional artists with many community partners to help “dig deeper” into understanding the mostly untold history of Black Georgetown. Making his debut is music prodigy **Ronald “Trey” Walton**, a rising-star and recent **Duke Ellington School for the Arts** alumnus is the chosen composer; **Jarrod Lee**, multi-talented Baltimore-based singer-writer is librettist, accomplished composer, pianist, organist, and vocalist **Evelyn Simpson Curenton** serves as music director; and award-winning **Thomas W. Jones II** is the stage director. The actors are some of the area’s finest: **Roz White**, **Ayana Reed Ogunsunlade**, **Cara Schaefer**, **Sheri Jackson**, **Dr. Lloyd Mallory**, and **Brandon Lockhart**. Costume co-designers **April Carter** and **Frankie Bethea** from **Howard University**.

As a new *partner across the river* The Alliance of New Music-Theatre will present ***Voices of Zion*** in a special preview showcase at **THEARC** on **April 16th, 2022** as part of DC’s commemoration of **the 160th DC Emancipation Day**. Joining in this celebration and in support of DC statehood, [Quilts4DC](#) will offer a special quilting exhibition in the lobby during the preview. The premiere will follow with *on-location* performances at the ***Mt Zion/Female Union Band Society Cemeteries*** in Georgetown throughout the month of May (Fridays and Saturdays) leading to a special final *Memorial Day* (formerly known as *Decoration Day*) performance. “This finally helps us learn a little more about the full story of Georgetown and the history and contributions of African Americans. The idea is if we are to move forward in America, we need to

know our history and discover who we are really. African American cemeteries across the country provide us history and narratives that fill in the gaps,” said Susan Galbraith, Artistic Director, Alliance for New Music-Theatre.

Dates and Tickets:

The **VOICES OF ZION** preview on **Saturday, April 16** is at **7 pm** at THEARC Theater, [1901 Mississippi Ave SE, Washington, DC](#) in Anacostia. The preview is being offered at *the East of the River* special rate of **\$25 per ticket**. Tickets for the preview are now available at: <https://www.tix.com/ticket-sales/tix/6046/event/1262051> For group sale discounts contact info@newmusictheatre.org or call 202-256-7614

Following the preview, immersive performances will be offered in Georgetown the evenings of **May 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21** starting at 7 pm. We are also offering a special final performance at 2pm on **Memorial Day, May 30**. On-site performances start in the [Mt. Zion & Female Union Band Society cemeteries \(2501 Mill Rd NW\)](#) with an introduction to the characters before the audience joins in a procession to [Dumbarton United Methodist Church \(3133 Dumbarton St NW\)](#) for Part II of the work where the orchestra and members of the two church choirs will join the ensemble, followed by discussion. For this moveable feast, wear comfortable shoes for the cemetery and be prepared to walk through Georgetown for approximately 15 minutes. Followed by a discussion on where we are today. In case of inclement weather, all May performances will be held at the Dumbarton United Methodist Church.

Voices of Zion unites stakeholders and sponsors from a broad range of sectors including: *Coalition of African American Performing Artists (COPPA), The Rotarian Club of DC, Georgetown Presbyterian Church, Georgetown University, Headstones and History (Eagle Eye-Tutoring), and Dumbarton House Museum. Sponsorship opportunities are still available, please contact info@newmusictheatre.org or call 202-256-7614 for more information.*

Also note the *Mt Zion/Female Union Band Historic Memorial Park* will host a DC Emancipation Day libation ceremony, reading of names of the emancipated and walk-about tour. The event will take place at the cemeteries at 10am on April 16th.

ABOUT MT. ZION – FEMALE UNION BAND HISTORIC MEMORIAL PARK

The Mt. Zion - FUBS Foundation is a nonprofit, established in 2005 to jointly manage the preservation and commemoration of the Mt. Zion and Female Union Band Society Cemeteries. Active from 1808 to 1950 and historically African American, the two cemeteries share nearly equal parts of 3-acres and are two of the oldest remaining African American cemeteries in greater Washington, DC. They were officially listed in the National Register on August 6, 1975 and in 2018 designated an UNESCO site of memory associated with the Slave Route Project. The sites historical significance dates to both pre-and post-Civil War eras and served as refuge to those fleeing slavery on the Underground Railroad. For more information visit www.blackgeorgetown.com

ABOUT ALLIANCE FOR NEW MUSIC-THEATRE

Alliance for New Music-Theatre believe that through collaboration and in partnership with key arts organizations, embassies, and other institutions, we can transform the capital into a world-class center for cross-fertilization in the arts. We can create opportunities for new voices and bring stories to the stage that matter -- with music that breaks open hearts. We share a vision that through bold and healing art-making and practices we improve our community and the globe. To learn more about the show, go to <https://www.newmusictheatre.org/voicesofzion>

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