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“VIOLINS OF HOPE” TO INSPIRE INCLUSION AND REMEMBRANCE

African American women’s organization to promote Birmingham as beacon for community and unity

Creator and founder Amnon Weinstein embraces Birmingham’s civil rights legacy

BIRMINGHAM, AL (Mar 30) – The Birmingham (AL) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, today announced support for *Violins of Hope* (VOH), a community-wide event that will feature historic violins played by Jewish musicians during the Holocaust.

The four-day event will kick-off Wednesday, April 11, 2018, at the historic Sixteenth Street Baptist Church at 7 p.m. with a free multifaceted, multicultural tribute “Dreams of Hope” directed by music composer and conductor Dr. Henry Panion. Various other events will follow over the succeeding days, including lectures and educational programs at area schools. A concert by the Alabama Symphony Orchestra on Saturday, April 14, at Alys Stephens Center will conclude the four-day event at which orchestra members will play violins from the VOH collection.

“The Birmingham (AL) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated is honored to serve as a community partner for this most historic event. We join with others in the community to learn about the past as we focus on the future through this unforgettable, cultural and meaningful experience,” said Chapter President Monique Witherspoon.

In addition to the Birmingham (AL) Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, the project is supported by organizations across Birmingham, including Leadership Birmingham, Birmingham Holocaust Education Center, Birmingham Jewish Federation, UAB Institute for Human Rights, Red Mountain Theatre Company, Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center, ABC 33/40, Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham and the city of Birmingham.

According to VOH creator and founder Amnon Weinstein, the restored “Violins of Hope” have become literal instruments for tolerance and peace around the world. For this reason, Weinstein said he is especially pleased to bring these restored violins to Birmingham.

“It has been my hope that these violins can be played in Birmingham, Alabama, so that those who helped change the story of civil rights in America can hear their messages of hope for the future of all humankind,” said Weinstein, who will be accompanied in Birmingham by his wife, Assi, and their son, Avshi.

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Weinstein's invitation to Birmingham came from Sallie Downs, who had seen a segment on television about the violins. Downs traveled to Tel Aviv to ask Weinstein to bring "Violins of Hope" to Birmingham.

According to Downs, the faith-based community has responded favorably to *Violins of Hope*. "Many churches, synagogues, and mosques will use these violins as focal points to exchange ideas about the need for actions that advocate tolerance and peace among people of different belief systems. The lessons of the Holocaust are not just for Jewish people but for all who aspire to live in harmony and with mutual respect for others," Downs said.

Nearly 50 years ago a Holocaust survivor first brought a violin into Amnon Weinstein's shop for restoration, saying he had played the instrument while Nazi soldiers marched others to their deaths. When Weinstein opened the violin case, he saw ashes and could go no further. He was overwhelmed at the thought of his own relatives who had perished in the Holocaust.

In 1996, though, Weinstein put out a call for violins from the Holocaust and began restoring them, hoping to honor the memories of those who died in concentration camps and to give voice to their stories. "Music connects us to history in a way we can relate to, and that's particularly true of the violin considered to be the closest instrument to the human voice," Weinstein said. "Just thinking about the role violins played during the Holocaust makes us shiver as we feel, think, and identify with the victims."

Tina Kempin Reuter, PhD and Director of the Center for Human Rights at UAB said, "Violins of Hope reminds us that that when we speak of incredible atrocities like the Holocaust, we speak of people, not numbers nor situations. People who were/are parents, children, sisters, brothers, wives, husbands. Who loved, cried, laughed, and celebrated. Who played music. Who feared for their lives and those of loved ones. And who experienced terrible suffering and loss, which is why we need to acknowledge them and their humanity. 'Violins of Hope' reminds us of their lives, their humanity, and their legacy."

Carlos Izcaray, Music Director of the Alabama Symphony Orchestra said, "Birmingham is one of history's epicenters of human rights developments, and as such, is a unique and special place where Violins of Hope can prove the power of music. This is an opportunity to connect with the deep stories of our past and will give us a moment to reflect on an ever-brighter future. We at the ASO are honored to participate in this very meaningful event."

Jeffrey Bayer, who is co-chairing the project with his wife, Gail, said "These extraordinary instruments have the potential to make a lasting impact on a world that often seems torn by division and hatred. A profound personal story lives within each violin, and together they have the potential to leave an indelible imprint on every person who sees and hears them."

For tickets and further information, please visit www.violinsofhopebhm.org.

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