

For Immediate Release

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Performance inspired by John Brown's life commemorates the 150th Anniversary of John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry

Frederick, MD - Long the subject of song and story (recall "John Brown's Body Lies A-mouldering in the Grave" and a host of nursery and camp songs), abolitionist John Brown inspired contemporary folk artists Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino, who perform as Magpie, to compose a powerful musical program and a one-act play recalling the passion and pathos of Brown's life and its sacrificial end. "The Sword in the Spirit" – both the song cycle and the play – will be performed in Frederick on October 4 and 5, as a part of local commemorations of the 150th anniversary of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. The concert will be held Sunday, October 4 at 7 p.m. at the Weinberg Center for the Arts. The next evening, October 5 at 7 p.m., the play will be performed at the Cultural Arts Center. Tickets are \$10 per person at each performance location.



"The Sword of the Spirit" song cycle has been likened to a folk opera or ballad opera. It traces, in song, the lives of abolitionists John Brown and his wife Mary as well as the experience of other characters in the drama that unfolded at Harpers Ferry in October 1859. While most of the eleven songs are by Artzner or collaborations with Leonino, Si Kahn, Kim and Reggie Harris, Woody Guthrie, and Peggy Eyres also contribute songs. Guthrie's song is "The Ballad of Harriet Tubman." Magpie is known for strong vocals in rich harmony. Artzner plays guitar, and Leonino holds forth on harmonica, dulcimer, mandolin, and guitar. Magpie has performed music of social and environmental relevance for more than 35 years. In the fall of 1998, the Washington Area Music Association awarded Greg and Terry the "Wammie" award as traditional folk duo of the year. They also received the 1999 Addy Award for their song, "Take Me Back to Harpers Ferry," and their soundtrack for the video by the same title continuously show at the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park's Visitor Center.

The one-act play of the same name, "The Sword of the Spirit," transports the viewers to the end of November, 1859. The place is the county jail in Charlestown, Virginia, (today West Virginia), and also the home of abolitionist Lucretia Mott near Philadelphia. John Brown has spent the last forty days of his life in the jail cell. During this time he has received many visitors, given interviews and composed over one hundred letters to acquaintances, friends, and members of his family, including his wife, Mary. At rise Brown addresses the audience. He tells them his story, expounding on his life, his beliefs, and what he considers his God-given



mission to destroy the evil of slavery. From another part of the stage Mary writes to him from Lucretia Mott's home, where she has stopped on her journey to see him one last time. She also addresses the audience directly, telling the story of her life with her famous husband to "Mrs. Mott." As the play progresses, their stories become intertwined, as husband and wife "converse" across the miles in dialogue based on the letters they wrote each other.



"The Sword of the Spirit" is a singular opportunity for the audience to participate as spectators, as witnesses, to this telling of the story of the famed radical abolitionist, this last session before Brown is taken to the gallows. Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino, collaborated with Richard Henzel on the script, and perform as the Browns. The play is the result of exhaustive research studying primary sources in collections across the county, culminating in a moving and compelling work of theatre. Their portrayals of the Browns give audiences an opportunity to see them from a new perspective, not as mythical, fanatical icons, but as human beings, people with human feelings, human strengths and weaknesses, but with absolute dedication to radical, direct action for a cause, a cause which would soon embroil the entire nation in Civil War.

The local Magpie performances are jointly sponsored by the Frederick Arts Council, the Weinberg Center for the Arts, and the Tourism Council of Frederick County. Ticket information for the Weinberg Center performance can be found at www.weinbergcenter.org. The Weinberg

Center for the Arts is located at 20 W. Patrick Street in Frederick, MD. The Cultural Arts Center of Frederick County is located at 15 W. Patrick Street, Frederick, MD. Contact 301-662-4190 for performance information at The Cultural Arts Center or visit www.frederickartscouncil.org.

To learn more about other great things to see and do in Frederick County, visit the Tourism Council of Frederick County website at www.fredericktourism.org. Frederick County is a part of Maryland's Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area (www.heartofthecivilwar.org) and the Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Heritage Area (www.hallowedground.org). For information about other nearby events commemorating the 150th anniversary of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, visit www.johnbrown.org.

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