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Local Artist Interprets Negro Spirituals in Parish Gallery Exhibit

Silver Spring, MD — For more than two centuries, millions of people around the world have enjoyed Negro Spirituals. These beautiful songs, filled with joy, hopes, pain, and despair, have been interpreted in countless ways. Cynthia Farrell Johnson's exhibition is a visual interpretation of these songs.

Lawrence Brown was Paul Robeson's arranger and piano accompanist for a time. He also accompanied the artist's father, Arthur T. Farrell, a bass-baritone. During the 1960s they performed Negro Spirituals and other works from the Robeson repertoire in the New York metropolitan area. Audiences were emotional and enthusiastic. It was not until Johnson heard the CD "Paul Robeson - The Power and the Glory," that she realized why. Listening to her father and Mr. Brown was like reliving Mr. Robeson's performances. This exhibition honors Arthur Farrell, Lawrence Brown—and Paul Robeson—and the work they did to preserve precious songs in our collective memories.



These paintings will be shown through **March 16** as part of the exhibit "**Many Thousand Gone: Songs of My Father**" by Cynthia Farrell Johnson, at the Parish Gallery in Georgetown. **The opening reception will be from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. on Friday, March 5. There will also be an artist talk from 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 13.**

Cynthia Farrell Johnson is a connoisseur of vibrant colors. Her gouache, acrylic and collage works have been inspired by people she met and places she lived during 25 years of globetrotting as a diplomat. Life in West Africa, Central and South America exposed her to a wide variety of artistic traditions and forms of expression. Training as a graphic artist and a degree in art history also shaped her style. Johnson's role models to this day are Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Faith Ringgold and Vincent Van Gogh. However, the influence of artists like Paul Klee and William H. Johnson (no relation) may also be seen in her work.

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A member of the **Rockville Art League**, **Strathmore**, **Black Artists of DC**, **Artomatic**, and the Washington chapter of **Women's Caucus for Arts**, Johnson's paintings are featured in the Maryland State Artists Registry, the DC Arts & Humanities Commission's Art Bank and the State Department's Art in Embassies programs in Panama and Nicaragua. More of her work can be seen by visiting the gallery section of www.cfjfinearts.com.

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Photo: "Many Thousand Gone (No More Auction Block)" by Cynthia Farrell Johnson.

About Cynthia Farrell Johnson

Many Thousand Gone: Songs of My Father

Artist Statement

For more than two centuries, millions of people around the world have enjoyed Negro Spirituals. These beautiful songs, filled with joy, hopes, pain, and despair, have been interpreted in countless ways. This exhibition is a visual interpretation of these songs. Lawrence Brown was Paul Robeson's arranger and piano accompanist. He also accompanied my father, Arthur T. Farrell, a bass-baritone. During the 1960s they performed Negro Spirituals and other works from the Robeson repertoire in the New York metropolitan area. Audiences were emotional and enthusiastic. It was not until I heard the CD "Paul Robeson - The Power and the Glory," that I realized why. Listening to my father and Mr. Brown was like reliving Mr. Robeson's performances. This exhibition honors Arthur Farrell, Lawrence Brown—and Paul Robeson—and the work they did to preserve precious songs in our collective memories.

Mr. Brown and my father often rehearsed in our home on Sunday afternoons. Thus, I grew up hearing these songs, and as I matured, realized there were multiple messages in many of them. Such songs always moved me and I wanted to highlight and share them with a new generation.

The title of the exhibition comes from the song "No More Auction Block" where the focus is on the words that affected me most, "Many Thousand Gone." As a child, I found this song particularly haunting and powerful because it reminded me that many thousands had died to make the life I had and the opportunities before me possible. The message I took from it was that failure was not an option because too many people had worked too hard so I could be anything if only I applied myself and kept the faith.

Over the years we have drifted away from these songs, rich with history and simple musical genius, and hardly hear them in our worship ceremonies. My father sang these songs because he and Mr. Brown wanted to keep them alive. By honoring their memory and that of Paul Robeson, I wish to create a body of work that will call attention to them and generate interest on the part of those who are unfamiliar with these songs and the attendant history of the music and the performers.