

## 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Harpers Ferry Raid

### *John Brown: The Crusader and the Legacy of His Times*



MILLICENT SPARKS PRODUCTIONS, INC.

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### ***My Lord What A Mornin'...Vigil for John Brown***

“The withered hand of an old man whose hairs are white with the frosts of nearly 70 winters has given the death blow to American slavery . . . Hero, martyr, farewell!”  
Henry Highland Garnet

When John Brown, leader of the abortive raid on Harpers Ferry to free the slaves, was hung on the bright balmy morning of December 2, 1859, cities and towns throughout the North reflected the nation’s divisions over slavery. Yet, within black communities and among abolitionists, December 2<sup>nd</sup> was declared “Martyr Day,” a day of fasting and prayer in homage to the ‘Old Man.’ Bells tolled, and businesses and stores closed and were draped in black. Church services and public meetings were held at the hour of his hanging for the purpose of sanctifying the cause he represented. In most places, these gatherings were initiated and conducted by black people, though white abolitionists also took part. On Martyr Day in Philadelphia, hundreds of people came together for a vigil at Shiloh Baptist Church, a historic black church led by Rev. Jeremiah Asher, and to another at National Hall, located at 12<sup>th</sup> and Market. These Philadelphians came together to demonstrate their lasting affection and admiration for John Brown, and their deepened commitment to the ideals for which he sacrificed his life.

In a sesquicentennial commemoration of this historic event, a living history program, ***My Lord What A Mornin'***, will recreate at historic Shiloh Baptist the 1859 prayer vigils held for John Brown. Professional actors will portray prominent historical figures who came together to pay tribute to Captain Brown. Negro Spirituals sung by the “Black Swan,” the best-known black concert artist of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Shiloh’s Choir under the

direction of Beverly Bradley, will be interspersed throughout the 60 minute program.

The “spiritual presence” of John Brown has been added to this production to enhance the programming and help provide exposition for the audience. Veteran stage and screen actor, Norman Thomas Marshall, who portrayed John Brown for nine years in his one-man show, “Trumpet of Freedom,” will be Brown in the performance. Ironically, Marshall was born in Richmond, Virginia, the state that executed Brown, and is the son of a Klansman and grandson of a slave owner.

Shiloh’s current pastor, Rev. Edward Sparkman, will also appear in the production as Rev. Jeremiah Asher, the host pastor of the original Shiloh vigil, who later joined USCT during the Civil War.

Other performers include:

Millicent Sparks as Harriet Tubman

Leona Barnett as Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, the “Black Swan”

Maria Wolf as Lucretia Mott

Karen Vicks as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Larry Moses as Robert Purvis

Jack Hoffman as Rev. William Furness

A Reception will immediately follow the production.

This program is free and open to the public.

My Lord What A Mornin’...Vigil for John Brown

**6:00 pm, Tuesday, December 1, 2009**

Shiloh Baptist Church

2040 Christian Street

Philadelphia, PA 19146

**Program support provided by:** The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, the National Archives at Philadelphia, Moonstone Arts Center, the Abraham Lincoln Foundation of the Union League, Shiloh Baptist Church, and the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation, Quest for Freedom.



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