



## Overture with the Arts Celebrates Black History Month

-- Annual "Songs of Freedom" School Tour Gains Momentum on Two Continents --

**MONTREAL, January 2014** - Overture with the Arts ([OWTA](#)), a local non-profit organization dedicated to providing opportunities to disadvantaged youth, celebrates [Black History Month](#) for the fourth consecutive year with its highly popular school tour, [Songs of Freedom: Music as Reflection, Expression and a Tool for Social Change](#).

Local Grammy-nominated Hip-Hop artist, Jamaican/Canadian [Jonathan Emile](#), brings the African Diaspora to life through music in a 45-minute interactive, multi-disciplinary presentation that is both entertaining and educational. High school, CEGEP and university students go on a journey from slavery to freedom while examining music as an instrument of communication, reflection and an agent of social change. The presentation blends historical facts with traditional African music, Negro Spirituals and songs of the civil rights movement as well as some of Emile's original socially aware compositions, creating a dynamic event that never fails to connect with young audiences.

The **Songs of Freedom** school tour continues to grow within Canada and abroad. In November 2013, OWTA founder and Executive Director, [Akilah Newton](#), made huge strides by extending her organization's outreach into the UK and Europe. Directly following his featured role in the Segal Theatre production of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, Émile took **Songs of Freedom** to high schools in London, Liverpool (Newton is a graduate of [Sir Paul McCartney's Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts](#)) and St. Helens in the UK as well as Frankfurt, Germany. Visit [YouTube](#) to see Émile and students engage in **Songs of Freedom**.

Last February, **Songs of Freedom** ventured into Ontario and the response was so enthusiastic that the tour is booked with several Toronto schools for an entire week this year. "We just get bigger and better every year," Newton proudly stated. "Last year **Songs of Freedom** was booked every day in February, sometimes for multiple performances. This year, not only are we able to offer two distinct programs to address students of every age, but we've had to extend the tour from in late January to mid-March."

As mentioned above, this year Newton has tailored a new tour especially for elementary school children. The inaugural **Songs and Stories** tour is animated by [Tamara Brown](#), a well-known Montreal actor and musician. “Tamara and I first met singing in the Montreal Jubilation Gospel Choir and then reconnected later through Black Theatre Workshop’s YouthWorks program”, explained Newton. “We’ve wanted to work together for a long time but our schedules never meshed. The stars have finally aligned this year and I’m so happy to have her with us.” Brown and Émile are no strangers to one another either. Brown taught at Black Theatre Workshop the year Émile was there producing a film based on his experience fighting cancer and for which he won that year’s BTW award for artistic achievement. (December 2013 marked his third year in remission.)

Based in the West Island, Newton works tirelessly to develop and promote this and other community outreach programs. For the first time in December 2013, OWTA hosted **Winter Wonderland**, a holiday brunch for 35 local underprivileged families replete with donated gifts for everyone. OWTA’s anti-bullying program, **SPEAK**, kicked off this past fall at Kuper Academy and Laval Junior High School with at least five more schools booked for spring 2014. Using music and spoken word, **SPEAK** features Émile along with Toronto singer/songwriter **Kristen Cudmore**, front-woman of the indie-pop band [Language Arts](#). OWTA’s after-school program at Riverdale High School continues to offer training in music, dance and theatre to kids who would otherwise not have exposure or access to such programs.

The **Songs of Freedom** school tour is funded in part by [TD Bank Then & Now Series](#) and [Citizenship and Immigration Canada](#).

## About Overture with the Arts

Overture with the Arts is a non-profit organization dedicated to making performing arts education available to young people from all walks of life through subsidized workshops, interactive presentations and after-school programs. To learn more, visit [www.overturewiththearts.org](http://www.overturewiththearts.org).

## Related Links

- The Gazette, January 29, 2013  
<http://westislandgazette.com/news/story/2013/01/29/jonathan-emile-brings-soul-to-school/>
- CBC Television, February 7, 2013  
<http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Canada/Montreal/ID/2333197639/>
- The Chronicle, November 28, 2014  
<http://www.westislandchronicle.com/Community/2013-11-28/article-3519129/A-West-Island-role-model/1>