

***THE CHILDREN'S MARCH***

FULL LIBRETTO

CHARLOTTE BLAKE ALSTON, LIBRETTIST  
ANDREW BLECKNER, COMPOSER

**Commissioned by Singing City Choir**  
For the  
2013 Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts (PIFA)

**Premiere Performance: Friday, April 26, 2013**  
Performed By:  
Singing City Choir and Singing City Children's Choir

The Church of the Holy Trinity  
Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Text Copyright: ©Charlotte Blake Alston  
All Rights Reserved

**THE CHILDREN'S MARCH COMPLETE TEXT - CHARLOTTE BLAKE ALSTON**

**SECTION 1: OPENING**

**Once to Every Man and Nation: Combined choirs**

James Russell Lowell

Once to every man and nation  
Comes the moment to decide  
In the strife of truth with falsehood  
For the good or evil side  
Some great cause, some great decision  
Offering each the bloom or blight  
And the choice goes by forever  
'Twixt that darkness and that light

Tho' the cause of evil prosper  
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong  
Tho' her portion be the scaffold  
And upon the throne be wrong  
Yet that scaffold sways the future  
And behind the dim unknown  
Standeth God within the shadow  
Keeping watch above his own.

**Run, Mary, Run/You Got a Right to the Tree of Life: Children's Choir**

*Refrain*

**Leader/Call:** Run Mary run – run Martha run I say  
Run Mary run

**Chorus/Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

*Verses*

**Call:** Mary, Martha, you got a right

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

**Call:** The Hebrew children, they got a right

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

**Call:** Paul and Silas, they got a right

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

**Call:** Bible says that you got a right

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

*Refrain*

**Call:** Run Mary run – run Martha run I say  
Run Mary run

Final Draft

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

*Verses*

**Call:** Little Mary, you got a right

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

**Call:** Got ups and downs but you got a right

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

**Call:** I come to tell you – you got a right

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

**Call:** You got a right - you got a right

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life.

*Refrain:*

**Call:** Run Mary run – run Martha run I say

Run, Mary run

**Response:** You got a right to the tree of life

**All:** You got a right to the tree of life

You got a right to the tree of life

You got a right to the tree of life

You got a right to the tree of life

**14<sup>th</sup> Amendment: Adult Choir**

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws...

**NARRATOR:** ...section 1 of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America.

**NARRATOR continues:**

In the year of our Lord, 1619, the first ship carrying human cargo from the African continent landed on American soil in Jamestown, Virginia. In that very year, a unique struggle for freedom and human dignity began: a struggle unlike any other in the history of our nation. For Americans of African descent, that struggle would continue for three hundred forty-five years. From small acts of defiance, to spontaneous and planned escapes; from armed slave and abolitionist revolts, to seeking out the courts to uphold constitutional human rights and guarantees, the system of oppression was always met with resistance and an unrelenting determination to fight for God-given rights. But time after time, one court ruling overturned another and even just decisions handed down by higher courts were often ignored. But with every generation, the people pressed on.

## **SECTION 2: TIMELINE OF STRUGGLE**

**NARRATOR: 1850**

**Chorus:**

The Fugitive Slave Act did decree

A slave was not human - but someone's property

## Final Draft

If he made it to the north on the underground track  
He could be hunted down, captured – and taken back  
The law sent a message throughout the land  
No slave could ever hope to be a free man.

### **NARRATOR: 1857**

#### **Chorus:**

Dred Scott addressed the court and made a plea  
To purchase his family's liberty  
Six court justices did agree  
No Blacks could be citizens- slave or free  
The opinion of the court was clear and direct  
No Blacks had rights a white man should respect  
"If we allowed them to win this fight  
They may think they were entitled to broader human rights."

#### **Chorus:**

Emancipation Proclamation 1863  
By Presidential order the enslaved were set free  
The Civil War ends - in 1865  
The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment - proposed and ratified  
Meticulously crafted - majority approved  
Abolishing slavery and indentured servitude

### **NARRATOR: 1868**

#### **Chorus:**

The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment declared to all  
No citizen could be denied protection of the law  
But in many states there would be no compromise  
The rights of black citizens would not be recognized

Plessy versus Ferguson – eighteen ninety-six  
In transportation, said the court, the races shall not mix.  
The verdict struck a dark chord, announcing to the nation  
The high court upholds state sponsored segregation

### **NARRATOR: 1954**

#### **Chorus:**

In Topeka - Brown versus Board of Education  
In schools, they sought to (put an) end (to) segregation.  
The justices rendered an historic reprimand.  
The court ruled: 'separate but unequal' cannot stand  
The Board of Education had to concede - to  
Desegregate schools "with all deliberate speed".

In 1955 on a public city bus,  
Rosa Parks sat quietly – not making any fuss  
The driver stopped the bus - came to where she sat

## Final Draft

“This white man needs a seat. You must stand in the back”  
She said, “I will not stand. You will not prevail.”  
Policemen came – took Rosa off to jail

The community rose - to Rosa’s side  
And declared to the city – we will not ride!  
They walked – for three-hundred eighty-one days.  
Broke the back of the city in unprecedented ways  
Anyone who boarded and paid the fare  
Had the right to sit down – anywhere!

### **NARRATOR: 1957**

#### **Chorus:**

In Little Rock, nine students faced violent confrontation  
As they walked to Central High - to end school segregation  
One girl, surrounded by a hate-filled mob  
Sought help - from anyone in the crowd  
Searching for one kind face among the throng  
Instead of getting help, she was spat upon.  
Each day - hateful mobs threatening violent clashes  
The National Guard eventually walked the students to their classes

#### **On and On: Chorus**

On and on, year after year  
Roadblocks, barriers, intimidation, fear  
Dehumanized, brutalized, targets of your hate  
Who made you - the keeper of our fate?  
We will stand – strong - with justice on our side  
For it’s written in The Word and His truth is marching -

On and on, year after year  
Determination, litigation, demonstrations – we won’t  
Stop - - we - will withstand  
Each victory puts power in our hands  
We know that freedom has never been free  
So we’ll sacrifice and continue marching

On and on, year after year  
God is on our side – we will not walk in fear  
Our cause is blessed - by The Divine  
We will push ‘til something shifts in your mind  
Three-hundred years and still we stand  
Now our struggle has brought us to Birmingham!

On and on, time after time  
On and on – with God we’ll be pushing – ON!

### **SECTION 3: BIRMINGHAM**

#### **NARRATOR:**

Decades of the African American struggle for human dignity and to secure freedoms guaranteed by the constitution of the US came to an unforeseen climax in Birmingham Alabama in the spring of 1963. Birmingham: one of the most violent cities in the south. In 1963 there were 60 unsolved bombings of African American homes, churches and business; more than any other city in nation. It earned the city the nickname: Bombingham. Birmingham had enacted into law, racial segregation ordinances with some of the most detailed, restrictive and bizarre language of any American city.

#### **The Segregation Ordinance**

#### **NARRATOR: Sections 369 and 597 of the Segregation Ordinance of Birmingham**

It shall be unlawful - unlawful  
To conduct a place for serving food  
For white and colored in the same room  
It is unlawful - unlawful  
Unless a wall is built to separate the two  
The partition must be 7 feet or higher  
And a separate entrance for each side

It shall be unlawful - unlawful  
For a black and (a) white person to play together  
Or in company with one another  
It is unlawful - unlawful  
To play a game of cards or a board game  
In an inn or tavern or any public place

It shall be unlawful - unlawful  
For a black and a white person to engage in sports  
In company with one another  
It is unlawful  
To engage in softball or any game  
In a ballfield or stadium or private property

In Birmingham there will be separation  
In department stores and restaurants  
Office buildings, concert halls,  
Bus stations, waiting rooms  
Playgrounds, ball fields  
Sanctuaries, Classrooms  
Private homes, businesses

Unlawful – it is unlawful  
For citizens to  
Sit – play,  
Eat - ride  
Learn – dance  
Sing, pray, praise God!

## Final Draft

Together!  
It was unlawful  
To live in harmony  
In Birmingham

### **Mama Tell Me Why: Children's Choir**

Can you explain to me,  
Why they hate us so?  
Mama can you tell me  
Why there are places I can't go?  
I pray to God  
To help me understand  
Why they hate us so.

Tell me why they treat us mean  
Why do they act so violently?  
Why would a full-grown man  
Fear a little child like me?  
I pray to God  
To help me understand  
Why they hate us so.

The Bible says  
Jesus loves us all  
Do they have a different god  
Who made their hearts so small?  
I pray every night  
That God reveals to me  
Why they hate us so?

I will study hard to find the answer  
I'll talk to God each day  
Maybe He will use the children  
To make a brighter day...

Mama, when I see the signs  
Or hear the words they say, it seems  
That they really want me  
To give up on my dreams  
I pray every night  
That God reveals to me  
Why they hate us so.

No matter what they say to me  
I'll still walk tall and straight  
But it would be wonderful  
If we could put an end to all the hate  
Let's pray every night

## Final Draft

So we can understand  
Why they hate us so  
Why they hate us so  
Why they hate us - so

### **The god of Man: Adult Choir**

Will you sing for me so that I may hear  
The song you gave to the lark?  
Can you show me your power to walk on the sea  
When storms rage in the dark?  
Can you take me to where those who worship you  
Sing hosannas to your name  
Where the people of earth are healed by you?  
Then your greatness, I too will proclaim.

For you speak from a self-made holy place  
That grants you the power to subdue  
Nearly all of the children of God's green earth  
As though earth was made only for you  
In the deepest primordial place in my soul  
I need to understand  
Please tell of the moment in all of time  
When you became the god of man

But if you cannot reveal how you formed the earth  
Show your power to summon the wind  
How the breath you blew was the miracle  
For all life on earth to begin  
Then I will not fear your imagined myth  
Of a god-like supremacy  
For the Good News of the true Savior is not  
A gospel of bigotry.

I will stay with the God of Abraham  
Find rest in the palm of His hand  
I will neither worship nor bow down to  
You - self-made god of Man.  
So I bid you Godspeed in your delusion  
Your soul, the sacrificial lamb  
With God's love I say to you, god of Man  
Rest in peace in Birmingham

**NARRATOR:** Birmingham's African American leaders had experienced difficulty getting any significant, sustained participation from the black community in marches or protests. At the invitation of Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, Dr. King traveled to the city. He thought perhaps if he and other leaders marched and got arrested, black residents would be motivated to join them. But the masses of people did not materialize. Anyone seen picketing by a white employer could be terminated, their house foreclosed on or their car repossessed. Upon his release from jail, King called upon a young, outspoken minister named James Bevel.

**MLK:**

What we need to do is fill up the jails; put a strain on the economy.  
Until that strain forces them to yield as they did in Montgomery

**Bevel:**

I agree, Dr. King. I fully agree, but this isn't Montgomery, sir.  
Here they kill us with impunity; all our efforts they seek to deter.  
I believe we must think differently. With the adults we will not prevail.  
I believe our young people are up to the task. The children can fill up the jails.

**NARRATOR:** What Bevel knew that King may not have known was that children had been accompanying their parents to community meetings for months if not years. Many of the parents were active in voter registration initiatives, desegregating public venues and lobbying for educational equality. Guest speakers would be brought in to encourage and inspire. Some meetings were training sessions in non-violent civil disobedience. The children had been internalizing that information and becoming increasingly sophisticated in their understanding of both the content and intent of the gatherings.

**MLK:** I am not in favor of using our children to shoulder the task of adults.  
If adults understand the urgency; that their participation is a must,  
I believe they'll join together - and put aside their fear.  
Let's gather the community tomorrow tonight. I'm sure people will volunteer.

**NARRATOR:** Bevel remained skeptical that adults would step forward.  
Some who participated in protests had been fired from their jobs as a result. Lost jobs meant lost income for families. But children who were detained left no negative economic impact on the community. It was time for a new strategy. The young minister needed to get the word out to young people quickly. He turned to Shelley "The Playboy" Stewart, the most popular disc jockey at Birmingham's black radio station. Black and white teenagers alike, tuned in to WENN AM. But in between Chubby Checker and James Brown, Shelley was talking revolution. At Bevel's request, he hit the airwaves.

**DJ/NARRATOR:** *(in disc jockey cadence)*

Great Googly-Woogly, children - how do you do?  
I'm 'bout to spin some 45's for you  
All you young boys and girls out there  
Get ready to dance in some rarified air  
But when you finish your twist and your boogaloo  
Dance on over to 1530 Sixth Avenue  
The 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church will be comin' alive  
Dr. King will be spinnin' some Freedom jive.  
Great googly-woogly children - twist and shout  
This is the true voice of Birmingham - over and out!

**NARRATOR:** Adults and children filled the main floor and balcony of the sanctuary. As always, the meeting began with energetic singing.

**Woke Up This Mornin': Combined Choirs:** *(Spirited)*

Woke up this mornin' with my mind  
Stayed on freedom

## Final Draft

Woke up this mornin' with my mind  
Stayed on freedom  
Woke up this mornin' with my mind  
Stayed on freedom  
Hallelu! Hallelu! Hallelu-jah!

I'm gonna walk, walk! Talk, talk!  
Shout. Shout – with my mind on freedom  
Walk, walk! Talk, talk!  
Shout, shout – with my mind on freedom  
Walk, walk! Talk, talk!  
Shout, shout – with my mind on freedom.  
Hallelu! Hallelu! Hallelu-jah!

The church was full; their leaders spoke - the people said, "Amen!"  
Then to the podium stepped Dr. Luther King  
"I call upon your courage; we need people of faith  
To challenge segregation laws in this Southern state.  
Here in Birmingham the struggle will be even greater  
But we'll achieve victory with your help – sooner than later  
To bring about permanent change, we've got to raise the heat  
If you're willing to go to jail for progress, please, stand on your feet.

The crowd murmured and looked about – King tried to read their faces  
Seconds ticked by. King's shoulders fell when people kept their places.  
His mouth was dry, words did not come; sorrow filled his cup  
He searched his thoughts for words to say – and then – a child stood up.  
And then another and another, in the balcony and main floor  
The number swelled to ten, then, twenty - then twenty more  
The tension was replaced with shouts – then came thunderous applause  
The children of Birmingham stood up to shoulder the community's cause.

Dr. King expressed his doubts – but there was no turning around  
The stage had already been set, the gauntlet, laid down

### **SECTION 4: The Children March**

#### **Choir**

Word spread through schools in Birmingham and surrounding towns and cities  
Athletes and student officers joined strategy committees.

#### **Bevel:**

"Non-violence is at the core of how we will proceed  
You must commit to this strategy if we are to succeed  
If you cannot be nonviolent, you're inclined to hitting back  
Please do not march. You'll only give them reason to attack  
Everything we're fighting for; the future we envision  
Striking back will only breed more hatred and derision  
We ask that you be disciplined - a great deal is at stake  
The entire world will be watching and judging the way you participate".

## Final Draft

As whispered conversations spread, young children listened in  
The excitement was infectious. They couldn't help being drawn in  
Soon, little ones were talking about joining the fight  
To stand up and go to jail - for their civil rights.

### **I'm Going: Children's Choir** (*Spirited*)

My brother said he's going to jail. My sister's going too!  
They said they're marching for our rights – that's what I want to do!  
I want to go to jail so everybody can be free!  
Don't tell your mama – you can just come on and go with me.

#### *Chorus:*

I'll go! I'll go!  
I'm going too!  
I'm marching on that day.  
I'll be brave; I will not cry  
'Cause freedom's on its way.

I'll go! I'll go!  
I'm going too!  
I'm marching on that day  
And if I put my trust in God  
I know I'll be okay!

"Ain't you scared that you might die? They might beat you or worse!"  
"Well, if they kill me maybe they'll let me call my mama first.  
I don't know what will happen, or how God will provide  
But I know what the Bible says – the Lord is on our side."

#### Chorus

"I'll go! I'll go!" etc.

"I'll see you there!"  
"No, I'll see you there!"  
"That old Bull Connor won't know what to do!"

**Spoken or Sung:** When D-Day dawned, children tuned in to WENN

#### **DJ/NARRATOR:** (*DJ cadence*)

"This is the voice of Birmingham, your music master and friend  
Great Googly-Woogly, my beautiful ones, no sleeping in today  
Here's *Wake Up, Little Susie*, to start you on your way  
Get up, get dressed, get ready – to shine your light into the dark  
When school is out, there's gonna be a picnic in the park  
Put on your favorite outfit, your walkin' shoes and your nerve  
And don't forget your toothbrush, 'cause luncheon will be served!  
To keep your mind focused on the prize to be won,  
Here's a little tune from Ruby and the Romantics: *Our Day Will Come*."

**Adult Choir**

The children rushed to school that day after making preparations  
For an extended sleepover party - the first of its kind in the nation.  
Classrooms and hallways were abuzz. High school students were given jobs.  
Stand outside the windows of schools with signs that read: It's time  
Or at the appointed hour a student would pull the fire alarm

**NARRATOR:** Teachers, employees of the Birmingham school district could not participate, but many supported and encouraged their students.

**Teacher:**

I turned around to write on the board. I guess I wrote too long  
Because when I turned back around my students were all gone!

**Choir:**

They streamed down stairs, climbed out first floor windows like extras in a movie production  
Went running to 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church to get their instructions.  
They poured into the church like a tidal wave, anxious to begin.  
Then a thousand children lifted their voices and began to sing.

**I'm On My Way: Children's choir**

I'm on my way - to freedom land  
I'm on my way - to freedom land  
I'm on my way - to freedom land,  
I'm on my way - praise God,  
I'm on my way.

If you can't go, don't hinder me,  
If you can't go, don't hinder me.  
If you can't go, don't hinder me,  
I'm on my way - praise God  
I'm on my way!

I'm on my, praise God  
I'm on my way!

**NARRATOR:** Eugene "Bull" Connor was the Commissioner of Public Safety and an outspoken segregationist. He would ride through the streets of Birmingham in a white armored tank. He was famous for allowing acts of violence against black citizens to take place without police intervention. According to him, the Civil Rights Movement was a communist plot.

**Connor:** "They don't know that I got my spies to listen to what they're saying. You've got to know what your enemy is doing so you can crush 'em! These children wouldn't know how to spell the word freedom if you asked them."

**NARRATOR:** His plan was to take the children to the county jail so there'd be no strain on the city's judicial system. But what Bull Connor's spies didn't understand was the code language that was used. In essence, even though they listened in they had no idea what was about to unfold.

At the appointed hour on the morning of May 2, 1963, a group of fifty children lined up, two-by-two, walked down the steps of the church and onto the street toward downtown Birmingham.

## Final Draft

They didn't get more than a few blocks before their signs were taken, they were loaded into police wagons and driven to the county jail.

When the wagon was out of sight, another group of fifty children lined up, walked down the steps of the church and onto the street toward downtown Birmingham. They didn't get more than a few blocks before their signs were taken, they were loaded into police wagons and driven to the county jail.

**NARRATOR continues:** As soon as they were driven away,

### **Fifty More: Adult and Children's Choirs**

Fifty more -

(We are marching!)

Fifty more children

Fifty more -

(For our freedom!)

Fifty more children

Fifty more -

(We are marching!)

Fifty more children

Walked down the steps into history

(And we won't turn back!)

They kept coming and coming

(We are marching!)

They kept coming and coming

(We are marching!)

They kept coming and coming

(We are marching!)

They kept coming and coming

(We won't turn back!)

### **Children's Declaration: Children's Choir**

Like a rock worn to sand by the beat of ocean waves

We will march to put bigotry and hatred in their graves

With faith – the size of a tiny mustard seed

God will grant us the courage and protection we will need

We will walk - sing; we will hold, we will stand

Each step we take puts power in our hands

We will walk into your jails with a song on our tongue

Our fight for (human) dignity has only just begun.

You can take away our signs - we will walk, we will stand.

You can take away our food - God will hold us in His hand

We will march – we will march as one

We will march - 'til our work is done

We will walk, sing; we will hold, we will stand

## Final Draft

Each step we take puts power in our hands  
We will walk into your jails with a song on our tongue  
Our fight for (human) dignity has only just begun.

**NARRATOR:** By the end of the first day, nearly a thousand children had been arrested, fingerprinted and locked up for parading without a permit. When they ran out of paddy wagons, school buses were called in. When the county jails were full, children were taken to the city jails. When the city jails were filled they were taken to the fairgrounds. When the cattle stockades on the inside were full, children were placed in the outdoor pens, exposed to the elements.

**NARRATOR continues:** May 3, 1963 – Day 2

Over a thousand more children gathered at the church and at Kelly Ingram Park, the dividing line between the African American community and downtown Birmingham.  
Trying to stay ahead of the marchers, Bull Connor used fire trucks to block off streets.

**Freedom: Children:** (*Tune: Amen/joyful with claps*)

Freedom! Freedom!  
Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!  
Freedom! Freedom!  
Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!

**Connor:**

Stop! Turn back or you'll have regrets.  
Turn back now or you're gonna get wet.

**Ain't Gonna Let Nobody: Children:**

Ain't gonna let nobody  
Turn me 'round! Turn me 'round! Turn me 'round!  
Ain't gonna let nobody  
Turn me 'round!  
I'll keep on a-walkin'  
Keep on a-talkin'  
Marching up to Freedom Land.

Ain't gonna let Bull Connor  
Turn me 'round! Turn me 'round! Turn me 'round!  
Ain't gonna let Bull Connor  
Turn me 'round!  
I'll keep on a-walkin'  
Keep on a-talkin'  
Marching up to Freedom Land!

**Connor:**

If they won't leave then we'll give them a reason to run.  
Connect the fire hoses! Turn the water on!

**Choir:**

Set at a level that would peel bark off trees  
Firemen shot water in blasts before anyone could flee  
Boys steadied themselves against buildings. Their shirts were ripped to shreds  
The force flung girls over tops of cars and caught anyone who fled

## Final Draft

When students crouched, fell down or were blown off their feet  
Blasts of water rolled them down concrete and asphalt streets

### **Children:**

Aaahh! Aaahh! Aaahh!  
The water burns my skin!  
Aaahh! Aaahh! Aaahh!  
Run behind the tree!  
Aaahh! Aaahh! Aaahh  
Don't let it hit your face!  
Aahh! Aahh! Aahh!  
Don't let go of my hand!

**Connor:** Bring the dogs!

### **Choir:**

Police came rushing forward with dogs trained to attack  
They ran toward the children, lunging from the front and back  
Clamping teeth on skin and clothing - for age, there was no respect  
One chased a child under a car and bit him on the neck

### **Children:**

Aahh! Aahh! Aahh! Aahh!

### **Choir:**

The news footage and images were shown around the world  
The fabric of this brutal system was fully unfurled  
Exposing its true nature - human cruelty  
Displaying the depths of longstanding inhumanity

The images betrayed age-old southern rhetoric  
President John F. Kennedy said the pictures made him sick.  
Children were not deterred - they came out on the third day  
And a city fireman was heard to say:

### **Fireman/firemen:**

We're trained to fight fires – not to toss children about  
The flames of this fire can never be put out.

### **Choir:**

More children were arrested - and carted off to jail  
Over a thousand children – determined to prevail  
Showed up the next day and the next, transforming their childhoods  
To dismantle scaffolds of oppression as only children could.

For by the fourth day of the march, there'd been a change in the atmosphere.  
The fire hoses had little effect. The children had lost their fear.  
The spark that is kindled in the heart – when souls are kept in anguish  
Produces flames no water on the earth can extinguish

## Final Draft

Unity, courage, perseverance were qualities they heeded  
'Til an unjust system of segregation was soundly defeated  
Children toppled pillars of power, dismantled support beams of oppression  
And with their courage brought to its knees an inhuman and unjust system

City leaders began to engage in meaningful negotiations  
To place in the refuse of history, all laws of segregation  
The accomplishments in Birmingham began to turn the tide  
The victory was a wave others – friend - and foe – would ride

It led to the March on Washington – then came the bombing of 4 little girls  
Addie Mae, Cynthia, Carol and Denise – sweet sacrificial pearls  
But residual hatred was not enough to derail justice from its track  
President Lyndon Johnson proposed and signed the Civil Rights Act.

After weeks of imprisonment, officials released all children still detained  
They could scrub their bodies clean but the memories would remain  
But we must all remember when telling the proud story of this land  
That shining moment in history when (Black) children took a stand.

### **God Bless You: Adult Choir**

God bless you child, God bless you. God bless your sacrifice  
I did not know inside you was the Light of Paradise  
I could not see how God could use a precious child like you  
My heart is full – all I can say is God bless you

God bless you, child. God bless you for the gift you gave this land  
We prayed God's angels would hold you in their loving hands  
May He fill the rest of your childhood days with skies clear and blue  
My heart is full – all I can say is God bless you.  
My heart is full – all I can say is  
God – bless – you.

### **NARRATOR**

Who could ever have imagined that long-standing scaffolds of hatred and oppression would be dismantled by the courage and determination of the least of these – our children? But where was the rest of America? Time and time again in the land of the free, citizens turned a blind eye, stood passively by and allowed the cancer of hatred and intolerance to multiply, metastasize, and degenerate into brutality and the depths of human cruelty.

In honor, celebration and memory of...

Linda Brown, 7, in Topeka, Kansas; Birmingham's children, Earthaline Jefferson, 14, Lucille Jefferson, 12, Mamie Jefferson, 9; Gloria Lewis, Jerome Taylor, Gwendolyn Webb and a thousand more brave children whose names we will never hear.

In honor, celebration and memory of...

Final Draft

The Little Rock Nine, ages 14-16: Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Pattillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, Carlotta Walls.

In honor, celebration and memory of...

The Greensboro Four/ Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, Jr and David Richmond

In honor, celebration and memory of...

Those whose lives were taken: Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carol Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, Virgil Ware, Emmett Till...

We ask: If children, the most precious of our citizens, could stand up in the face of injustice, who are we to stand down when the voices of hatred and inhumanity resurface all around us and grow louder everyday?

The children's courage and sacrifice stand as a clarion call; a plea - for every human being on the face of the earth to dig deep within ourselves and harness whatever power we can to choose always, courage in the face of fear, justice in the belly of oppression and the light of truth in times of darkness.

Perhaps Martin Luther King said it best, "We must get rid of the notion that human progress rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. We must come to see that human progress is never inevitable. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals and without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation. We must make it clear that the time to do right is now and the time is always right to do right."

Freedom, justice and democracy must be safeguarded, tended to. Will you choose to be a caretaker for human dignity? Will you stand down in the face of injustice – or – stand up like the Children of Birmingham?

**Will You Stand? - Adult and Children's Choir**

Years have come and gone since the children marched that day  
May the memory of their sacrifice not soon fade away  
And even though their courage moved the conscience of our land  
Hate still seeks to have the loudest voice, to gain the upper hand

In a land where thousands died in the name of liberty  
And so many of her children have had to fight for equality  
Let us stay forever mindful that we can't be truly free  
If even one man stands alone, fighting for dignity.

Will you stand with the children of B'ham in the name of dignity?

Final Draft

Will you raise your voice with courage in the face of bigotry?  
The work of guarding freedom must continue everyday.  
For the future we envision rests on what we do today.

Wherever hatred multiplies, our love must increase  
Each one of us can choose to be an instrument of peace.  
Let's stand and claim the vision of the world we want to see  
(For) the world we leave our children depends on you and me.

**BALM IN GILEAD/CLOSING**

There is a balm in Gilead  
To make the wounded whole  
There is a balm in Gilead  
To heal the sin-sick soul.

Sometimes I feel discouraged  
And think my work's in vain  
But then the Holy Spirit  
Revives my soul again.

There is a balm in Gilead  
To make the wounded whole  
There is a balm in Gilad  
To heal the sin-sick soul.

**END**

*The Children's March*  
*Full Text*  
*Sunday February 17, 2013*  
*© 2012 Charlotte Blake Alston*  
*Commissioned by Singing City Choir for*  
*The 2013 Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts (PIFA)*  
*Music composed by Andrew Bleckner*  
*Premiere performance: Friday, April 26, 2013*  
*The Church of the Holy Trinity*  
*Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*  
*All Rights Reserved*