

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**In Harmony Event to present  
The Gospel Quartet Music Tradition of Jefferson County**

**Birmingham, Ala.** To present the history, significance, and artistic merit of the Jefferson County Gospel Quartet tradition, the Alabama Folklife Association will be holding the organization's annual event in Bessemer, Ala. The afternoon and evening of Saturday, November 5, 2011 will provide a variety of programs that will be free to the public. *In Harmony: Gospel Quartet Tradition, Teaching, and Training* will include a lecture, documentary film, roundtable discussion, and a concert featuring 2009 National Endowment for the Arts, National Heritage Fellow, The Birmingham Sunlights with The Pillars. The event will be held at Discovery Alabama Event Center at WaterMark Place, 4500 Alabama Adventure Parkway.

As noted by author Doug Seroff, "It was through the inspiration and direction of community-based quartet trainers that a distinctive regional quartet style took form in Jefferson County and was ultimately spread abroad." Today, this living musical tradition is carried on through local quartets, who practice, record, and perform. Many hold annual reunions in the Birmingham area, some having taken place for over sixty years. At 1:00 p.m., Doug Seroff will open the programs with a lecture on the pedagogy of gospel quartet singing. Seroff has independently researched African-American vocal harmony traditions and black music history for over thirty years. In collaboration with Lynn Abbott, he has written two books, *Out of Sight: The Rise of African American Popular Music, 1889-1895*, and *Ragged but Right: Black Traveling Shows, "Coon Songs," and the Dark Pathway to Blues and Jazz*, both published by the University Press of Mississippi.

Following the lecture, guests will enjoy a screening of *The Jefferson County Sound: Alabama's Black Gospel Quartets* by Robert Clem of Alabama. *The Jefferson County Sound* profiles five Alabama quartets who are still performing today: The Blind Boys of Alabama, Fairfield Four (based in Nashville but led by Jefferson County native Isaac Freeman), Four Eagles, Delta-Aires and Birmingham Sunlights. A graduate of Anniston High School and Birmingham-Southern College, Clem later received an M.F.A. from NYU Graduate Film School. He has been a fellow at the Sundance Institute writer/director's lab and his films include *Company K*; *Big Jim Folsom: The Two Faces of Populism*; *Eugene Walter: Last of the Bohemians*; *Malbis Plantation: From Greece to America*, and *In the Wake of the Assassins*.

After the film, singers of two generations will participate in a roundtable discussion to be recorded for documentation and preservation purposes. The day will end with the concert to feature The Pillars and The Birmingham Sunlights. The performance will begin at 5:30 p.m. The Birmingham Sunlights have toured nationally and internationally as ambassadors of the singing style and the members of The Pillars include Norman Wooding, Jr., Reverend Don Solomon, Henry Burton, and Bob Friedman, all of whom have over fifty years of experience singing, recording, and performing. Link to further information:

<http://www.alabamafolklife.org/content/harmony-gospel-quartet-tradition-teaching-and-training>

Sponsored by the Alabama Folklife Association

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