

PRESS RELEASE

***A SYMPHONY CELEBRATION* FEATURES 5-TIME GRAMMY AWARD-WINNING GROUP THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA WITH CONDUCTOR DR. HENRY PANION, III**

Music special with a full orchestra releases February 2024

(Boston, MA – FEBRUARY 9, 2024) **American Public Television (APT)** is thrilled to present a special televised concert-documentary featuring five-time Grammy-winning group, the Blind Boys of Alabama, conductor Dr. Henry Panion, III and members of The Alabama Symphony Orchestra. The new one-hour music special, ***A SYMPHONY CELEBRATION: THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA WITH DR. HENRY PANION, III***, will premiere on public television stations nationwide in February (check local listings). Produced by Audiostate 55 Entertainment, ***A SYMPHONY CELEBRATION*** is presented and distributed nationally by American Public Television.

Hailed as "Gospel Titans" by *Rolling Stone* magazine, the Blind Boys of Alabama—with a rich legacy spanning eight decades—rose to fame in the segregated South with their thrilling vocal harmonies and roof-raising live shows. Founded in 1939 by five visually impaired teenagers from the Alabama Institute for the Negro Deaf and Blind, the Blind Boys of Alabama have ascended from the Birmingham radio station WSGN to Carnegie Hall, the White House, the Grammy Awards and the Gospel Hall of Fame. Their album *Echoes of the South*, released in 2023, is currently nominated for three Grammy Awards. Their incredibly inspiring story will be shared in their first memoir *Spirit of the Century: Our Story* (Hachette Books March 19, 2024). The ever-inspiring gospel group has collaborated with everyone from Mavis Staples and Willie Nelson to Peter Gabriel and Ben Harper, and their decades-long relationship with Dr. Panion has led to this exhilarating fusion of gospel and orchestral music.

In between the group's iconic songs and covers such as "Let My Mother Live 'Til I Get Grown" and "Way Down in the Hole", specially curated and arranged by Dr. Panion III and backed by the orchestra and a 300-person choir, the program shares the history of the Blind Boys of Alabama and the origins of their music through intimate interviews and compelling biographical vignettes. Through these stories and performances, the viewers will get a sense of who the Blind Boys really are and what they symbolize, as Dr. Panion repeatedly emphasizes their enduring "great personalities" and "love for mankind" despite having grown up in a pre-Civil Rights America with physical hardships. The one-hour special was filmed in Alabama and focuses on messages of humanity, peace and love.

In addition to defying the odds and rising to national prominence, the Blind Boys broke down racial barriers and redefined gospel music along the way. "It's really unbelievable in many ways when you think about having to grow up like they did, singing and being invited to The White House but not being able to get a good hot meal in certain restaurants, in certain places in our country," Dr. Panion III says during ***A SYMPHONY CELEBRATION***. "But that did not change them. If anything, it made them embrace who they were and develop a greater sense of love for our country and our people. I think it's all about hope."

Conductor, composer, producer, educator and 2023 Alabama Hall of Fame inductee Dr. Henry Panion, III, PhD has arranged and orchestrated the Blind Boys' classic hits for this exclusive performance. Dr. Panion III, who has worked with over 50 orchestras—including the Royal Philharmonic and Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra—and renowned musicians including Stevie Wonder, Lionel Richie and Aretha Franklin, has won three Grammys for his work and, most recently, two Emmys in 2021 for the PBS documentary, *Dreams of Hope*. His work with The Blind Boys of Alabama, which has spanned over twenty years, has culminated into this sophisticated and genre-blending production.

The concert features a combined choir from Alabama's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), including Alabama State, Alabama A&M, Miles College, Tuskegee University and Talladega College. Choirs from Birmingham Southern College and the University of Alabama at Birmingham also join the show.

About Audiostate 55

Audiostate 55 Entertainment is a commercial music, film, and record label with projects currently distributed by American Public Television (APT) and Warner Music Group (WGM). The award-winning production company was the force behind the film *Dreams of Hope: Birmingham's Historic 16th Street Baptist Church Welcomes Violins of Hope*, winner of an unprecedented 13 Telly awards, 2 EMMYs and numerous film festivals throughout the world. Audiostate 55 Entertainment led the creative efforts of the 2022 World Games Opening & Closing Ceremonies, designing the full production for broadcast in over 100 countries, with a cast over 500 dancers, musicians, singers, field pageantry artists, and stars such as Sheila E, Bootsy Collins, Lionel Richie, American Idols Ruben Studdard and Taylor Hicks, Yolanda Adams, Tony Toni Tone, ALABAMA, and the Blind Boys of Alabama. Its record label and music production arm is responsible for numerous top Billboard hits by artists such as gospel Icon Kirk Franklin and Pastor Mike, Jr., and live symphonic presentations in storied concert halls such as The Kennedy Center with the National Symphony Orchestra and R&B singer India Arie.

About American Public Television

American Public Television (APT) is the leading syndicator of high-quality, top-rated programming to the nation's public television stations. Founded in 1961, APT distributes 250 new program titles per year and more than one-third of the top 100 highest-rated public television titles in the U.S. APT's diverse catalog includes prominent documentaries, performance, dramas, how-to programs, classic movies, children's series and news and current affairs programs. *Midsomer Murders*, *America's Test Kitchen*, *AfroPoP*, *Rick Steves' Europe*, *Pacific Heartbeat*, *Christopher Kimball's Milk Street Television*, *The Indian Doctor*, *Legacy List with Matt Paxton*, *Lidia's Kitchen*, *Kevin Belton's New Orleans Kitchen*, *Simply Ming*, *The Best of the Joy of Painting* with Bob Ross, *Front & Center*, James Patterson's *Kid Stew* and *NHK Newslines* are a sampling of APT's programs, considered some of the most popular on public television. APT also licenses programs internationally through its APT Worldwide service and distributes Create[®]TV — featuring the best of public television's lifestyle programming — and WORLD[™], public television's premier news, science and documentary channel. To find out more about APT's programs and services, visit APTonline.org