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**PHANTOM OF THE OPERA'S DAVIS GAINES MAKES BEAUTIFUL MUSIC WITH JOY ABBOTT, WIFE OF GEORGE ABBOTT, TO HELP RAISE FUNDS FOR PHILADELPHIA'S GESU SCHOOL**

**More than 400 guests fill the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts' Samuel M.V. Hamilton Building for "Gesu on Broadway," a benefit to fund Gesu School scholarships for inner-city children**

PHILADELPHIA (October 2005) – Some amazing “Music of the Night” filled the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts’ Samuel M.V. Hamilton Building when *The Phantom of the Opera*’s Davis Gaines performed Broadway favorites with Joy Abbott, wife of the legendary George Abbott, for a sell-out crowd of 400. The one-night-only event, “Gesu on Broadway,” raised \$200,000 to fund scholarships for inner-city children to attend Gesu School, a North Philadelphia independent Catholic elementary school that has been recognized as a national model for urban education.

As the school’s first-ever such fundraiser, the evening kicked off with a glamorous cocktail reception and a musical introduction from the gospel choir at Gesu, which serves 433 pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade students. The audience was then treated to an unforgettable revue of some of the world’s most treasured music, including a few from the cherished songbook of George Abbott musicals. Guests soaked up the soaring melodies sung by Gaines, who is best known for his many performances of the title role in Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *The Phantom of the Opera*, and Joy Abbott, a Temple University alumna, American Theater Wing patron and former Theater Hall of Fame chair. Providing musical accompaniment was Carol Anderson, an accomplished pianist and sought-after musical director, arranger and composer.

Few eyes stayed dry by the end of the evening, when the gospel choir joined the performers for a soulful rendition of “Somewhere” from *West Side Story* to close out the show. The stellar performances may have been the draw, but the night’s true stars were the children whose lives have been so dramatically influenced by Gesu. The school’s impact was described in heartfelt ways at the event by several Gesu leaders, alumni and students, including fifth-grader Jasmine Lopez, who said she feels “lucky and happy” to be at Gesu – her home away from home since she was 4 years old.

“When people visit Gesu, they feel the hope and dreams within our children,” said Gesu School President Christine S. Beck as she thanked guests for turning out in support of the school. “That’s what motivated my dear friend Joy Abbott and her close friend Davis Gaines to do this show. The fact that so many of our children succeed, in spite of tremendous family and societal odds stacked against them, is proof positive that Gesu School works.”

One shining example of that success is Gesu alumnus Ashton Miller, who told the evening’s guests why Gesu meant so much to him. “I am so thankful for having gone to Gesu,”

said Miller, a St. Joseph's Preparatory School sophomore who holds a 3.96 grade point average and hopes to attend an Ivy League university. "It challenged me, taught me new things and set the foundation for me to succeed."

Since its 1993 rebirth as an independent school with an open admissions policy, Gesu has attracted prominent national figures and media attention, including a major feature in *Education Week* and coverage from the likes of *USA Today*, the Associated Press and MSNBC, for its achievements in educating inner-city children. With the money raised by "Gesu on Broadway," the school can reduce the gap between the modest tuition its families pay and the actual cost to educate each student – thus providing opportunities to children who are often left behind.

"Gesu School is, at its heart, about kids," said Board of Trustees Chair Winston J. Churchill. "It's about second chances for children who will get few second chances in their lives. It's about justice."

At the core of the school's success is its philosophy that every child can learn, buttressed by high academic expectations and programs that address individual students' needs, including pre-kindergarten and single-gender classes, a resource room, intensive literacy programs, counseling and peer mediation, mentoring and after-school programs. More than 70% of its students live within two or three miles of the school, come from single-parent households and qualify for free or reduced-fee breakfast and lunch programs. In spite of slow and difficult starts, more than 90% of its eighth graders attend competitive high schools, and 95% of the students go on to graduate from high school in a neighborhood where the graduation rate is less than 50%. A growing number are going on to college.

Helping to make "Gesu on Broadway" a success were committee co-chairs Karen and Philip Earley and Susan and Bill Shea, along with committee members Ellen Bachow; Chris and Leif Beck; Ed Beckett; Letitia Biddle and David Knox; Jim and Lynne Brown; Laura and Stuart Bryan; Win Churchill; Gretchen and Gordon Cooney; Susan and Mark Dinneen; Karen and Patrick Duffy; Vivienne Lambert Ehret; Peter Gould; Charlene Guyer; Anne and Michael Haney; Drake Haskins; Hettie Herzog; Bob and Anne McAlaine; Susan Kim and John Panichello; Nyree Lyons; Byron McCook; Sarah and Scott Miller; Keith Pension; Steve and Mary Ann Phillips; Freddie Reisman; Lucy and Roger Reynolds; Elise and Bill Rouse; Michael Rouse; Bette and Ralph Saul; Mark and Paula Solomon; Suzanne Stack; and Erica Talley-Asaka.

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