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New Broadcast and Live Event Series Examines Current Events Through Personal Narrative

Commonspace, a new project supported by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, tackles leading headlines at the human level

**Available online after 1/27/17; First broadcast airs on WHYY 1/29/17;
Event listings at acommonspace.org**

January 19, 2017 – Two of Philadelphia’s leading cultural organizations – First Person Arts (FPA) and WHYY— are launching *Commonspace*, a news-themed storytelling radio program, podcast and event collaboration. Drawing from their respective expertise in storytelling and journalism, the organizations have created *Commonspace* to amplify remarkable true stories that speak to the pressing issues of our time as a novel way of inviting audiences to process today’s headlines, and feel more connected to the world.

From tackling hot button issues like immigration and mental health to investigating why “Being a Black Man is a Full Time Job,” monthly programs will address some of today’s pressing topics through personal accounts of people from all walks of life, alongside archival news content, historical context and artistic responses to the topics. Supplemental podcast episodes will give listeners deeper dives into the themed conversations featured in the main hour-long programs.

In the premiere episode, a doctor, a professional athlete, an educator, and a veteran, sit down to explore what life is like for black men in the United States today. “The first time I became conscious of race, I remember distinctly I was in first grade,” says City of Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services Commissioner **Arthur C. Evans**. “I was in a segregated school. I remember seeing a bright skinned person get moved to the slower class, and it was jarring because at that age, I believed that if you had brighter skin that you were automatically a brighter person.”

Other featured *Commonspace* guests include Philadelphia’s first Poet Laureate **Sonia Sanchez** and Super Bowl champion **Raheem Brock**.

“We’re seeing that people today want to connect—they want to share their lives,” said FPA Executive Director and *Commonspace* host Jamie J. Brunson. “*Commonspace* is the first storytelling project specifically dedicated to examining current events in the news through the lens of personal experiences. It’s all about discovering what you might have in common with someone who you never would have imagined connecting with before.”



Together Brunson and Elisabeth Perez-Luna, Commonsplace Executive Producer and WHYY's Executive Producer of Audio Content shape each episode to offer the audience a deeper understanding of what's taking place in society while positioning the storyteller's perspective as a catalyst for further dialogue.

"*Commonspace* is a tremendous opportunity to help audiences experience news stories on a human level," said WHYY President and CEO William J. Marrazzo. "This project's various components—events, radio broadcasts, and podcasts— magnify the reach of these thought-provoking narratives and change the tone and nature of conversations around sometimes difficult, often complex issues."

As part of the project, 48 programs will air on WHYY over the next two years, plus 52 supplemental episodes available via podcast only. The two organizations will produce 26 events, which will help create content for the programs and for WHYY news reports.

The hour-long radio show will air on WHYY the last **Sunday of each month at 8 p.m. beginning January 29, 2017**. Podcasts are available at acommonspace.org and can also be found on iTunes and Stitcher starting January 27, 2017. Upcoming events will also be listed at the project website, acommonspace.org.

Commonspace has been supported by The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage.

About First Person Arts

Now in its 15th year, First Person Arts is Philadelphia's premier storytelling organization and the producers of StorySlams, the Annual First Person Arts Festival, First Person Arts Podcast, and Applied Storytelling community engagement programs. From such artistic luminaries as novelist Toni Morrison, activist Angela Davis, and celebrity chef Marcus Samuelsson, to everyday people at twice-monthly StorySlams, FPA presents a diverse array of storytellers in order to foster an appreciation for our unique and shared experiences, and connect us with each other and the world.

About WHYY

WHYY advances civic life through news, arts, education and civic dialogue. As the region's leading public media provider and PBS/NPR member station, WHYY's multimedia outreach includes WHYY-TV, WHYY-FM, WHYY's award-winning online home for news and civic dialogue, NewsWorks.org and "off-air" community forums, artistic performances, lectures and media education programs through the Dorrance Hamilton Public Media Commons.