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## **Baltimore Center Stage Announces Cast and Artistic Team for *Jazz* World Premiere**

**Baltimore—May 10, 2017.** Baltimore Center Stage is pleased to announce the cast and artistic team for *Jazz*. This world premiere play is based on the book by Toni Morrison, adapted by Nambi E. Kelley and directed by Baltimore Center Stage Artistic Director Kwame Kwei-Armah.

In Morrison's exhilarating novel, Joe and Violet move from the Virginia countryside to Harlem at the turn of the century, young and in love. Twenty years later, Joe's interactions with a young woman set off a series of violent events and unforgivable acts. Peeling back layers and alternating perspectives expose ultimately sympathetic characters, who—like the growing New York neighborhood and the winding woods of their youth—reveal their own rhythms.

"I'm a huge fan of Toni Morrison, and of *Jazz* in particular. It's an important chronicle of the human experience, and although it takes place in the 1920s, the story's themes still resonate today," said Baltimore Center Stage Artistic Director Kwame Kwei-Armah. "I'm thrilled to direct such a talented group of actors and designers to bring Playwright Nambi Kelley's vision to life on the stage in Baltimore."

Kelley has penned plays for Steppenwolf, Goodman Theatre and Court Theatre/American Blues Theater in Chicago, Lincoln Center and the National Black Theatre in New York, and internationally with LATT Children's Theatre/ Unibooks Publishing Company (South Korea) Teatri Sbagliati (Italy), and The Finger Players (Singapore). The world premiere of her adaptation of *Native Son* (published by Samuel French) was presented to critical acclaim at Court Theatre/ American Blues Theatre (co-production) and was nominated for five Jeff Awards including best adaptation and production of the year.

The cast includes **Jasmine Batchelor\*** (Dorcas), **Jason Bowen\*** (Henry Lestory), **Leon Addison Brown\*** (Joe Trace), **Jasmine Carmichael\*** (Young Violet/Felice), **Shanésia Davis\*** (Violet), **Warner Miller\*** (Young Joe/Acton), **Michele Shay\*** (Alice Manfred/True Belle), **Benja Kay Thomas\*** (Malvonne), **Avery Whitted\*** (Golden Gray/Parrot), and **Greg Boyer\*** (Trombonist).

The artistic team includes **Nambi E. Kelley** (Playwright), **Kwame Kwei-Armah** (Artistic Director/Director), **Kathryn Bostic** (Music Director and Composer), **Tim Mackabee** (Scenic Designer), **David Burdick** (Costume Designer), **Michelle Habeck** (Lighting Designer), **Alex Basco Koch** (Projection Designer), **Shane Rettig** (Sound Designer), **Tommy Kurzman** (Hair, Wig and Makeup Designer), **Paloma McGregor** (Choreographer), **Arminda Thomas**

KWAME KWEI-ARMAH, OBE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
MICHAEL ROSS MANAGING DIRECTOR

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THE STATE THEATER OF MARYLAND

(Dramaturg), **Rick Sordelet with Sordelet INK** (Fight Choreographer), **Pat McCorkle McCorkle Casting, Ltd.** (Casting Director), **Geoff Boronda\*** (Stage Manager) and **Erin McCoy\*** (Assistant Stage Manager).

\*Member of Actors' Equity Association.

*Jazz* opens Friday, May 26, with previews May 19-23, and closes Sunday, June 25. For more information, visit [www.centerstage.org](http://www.centerstage.org) or call the box office at 410.332.0033. Press night is Friday, May 26.

*Jazz* is made possible by a National Endowment for the Arts ArtWorks grant, the Laurents Hatcher Foundation, PNC and the William L. and Victorine Q. Adams Foundation and the Rodgers Family Fund. The *Jazz* media partner is Maryland Public Television. Baltimore Center Stage is supported by a grant from the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC), an agency dedicated to cultivating a vibrant cultural community where the arts thrive. An agency of the Department of Business and Economic Development, the MSAC provides financial support and technical assistance to nonprofit organizations, units of government, colleges and universities for arts activities. Funding for the MSAC is also provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, and the Baltimore County Commission on Arts and Sciences. Baltimore Center Stage's 2016/17 Season is made possible by The Shubert Foundation and the Baltimore County Commission on Arts and Sciences.

#### **About Baltimore Center Stage**

Baltimore Center Stage is a professional, nonprofit institution committed to entertaining, engaging and enriching audiences through bold, innovative and thought-provoking classical and contemporary theater.

Named the State Theater of Maryland in 1978, Baltimore Center Stage has steadily grown as a leader in the national regional theater scene. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Kwame Kwei-Armah OBE and Managing Director Michael Ross, Baltimore Center Stage is committed to creating and presenting a diverse array of world premieres and exhilarating interpretations of established works.

Baltimore Center Stage believes in access for all—creating a welcoming environment for everyone who enters its theater doors and, at the same time, striving to meet audiences where they are. In addition to its Mainstage, Off Center and Family Series productions in the historic Mount Vernon neighborhood, Baltimore Center Stage ignites conversations among a global audience through digital initiatives, which explore how technology and the arts intersect. The theater also nurtures the next generation of artists and theater-goers through the Young Playwrights Festival, Student Matinee Series and many other educational programs for students, families and professionals.

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