

For immediate release
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Premiere of *Josephine Tonight* opens at MetroStage Jan. 26

Carolyn Griffin is pleased to announce that MetroStage will be presenting the premiere of a new musical, **Josephine Tonight**, with book and lyrics by Sherman Yellen, and music by Wally Harper, Jan. 26-Mar. 18, 2012. This new musical is inspired by the early years of Josephine Baker, the young performer from East St. Louis who landed on the most famous stages in Paris. It follows the remarkable journey of a stunning talent who embraced life to the fullest, who overcame the many challenges of the period, becoming the iconic, ground-breaking performer of an era. Maurice Hines is the director and choreographer. Mel Johnson Jr. is the associate director, and David Alan Bunn is the music director, arranger, and orchestrator.

Sherman Yellen wrote the Tony-nominated libretto for the musical, *The Rothschilds*, with music by Jerry Bock and Sheldon Harnick, and *Rex*, with music by Richard Rodgers. His satirical sketch, *Delicious Indignities*, was a highlight of the ground-breaking erotic revue, *Oh! Calcutta!* His collaboration with the late composer Wally Harper on *Say Yes*, a light hearted musical comedy about the 1939 New York World's Fair, was produced in 2000 by The Berkshire Theatre Festival. It was later revised as *This Fair World* where it was performed at Stages, the festival of new musicals in Chicago. In this and in *Josephine Tonight*, originally produced by Theatre Building Chicago, Yellen was both librettist and lyricist for composer Harper. Wally Harper worked on Broadway with Tommy Tune, Gower Champion, Hal Prince, Vivian Matalon, Gerald Freedman and Donald Sadler but is perhaps best known as the pianist, music director and arranger for the legendary Barbara Cook. Mr. Harper shared a thirty-one year collaboration with Miss Cook in cabaret, Broadway, Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall and conducted major orchestras in Philadelphia, London and Australia for her appearances. His ten year writing relationship with Sherman Yellen resulted in two original musicals, *This Fair World* (originally *Say Yes*) and *Josephine Tonight*.

Maurice Hines is the iconic tap dancer who is also an actor, director, and choreographer. He began tap lessons when he was 5 years old at the Henry LeTang Dance Studio in Manhattan. He first

appeared on Broadway at the age of 11, and toured internationally as Hines, Hines and Dad with his father and brother, Gregory. He was in the national tour of *Guys and Dolls*, has been on Broadway in *Eubie!*, *Sophisticated Ladies* and many others. In 2009 Mr. Hines choreographed the world premiere of *Cool Papa's Party* here at MetroStage and received a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Choreography. He was last seen in Washington choreographing and starring in Arena Stage's production of *Sophisticated Ladies* at the Lincoln Theatre.

Associate Director Mel Johnson Jr. is an actor, director and producer but probably best known for his co-starring role opposite Arnold Schwarzenegger in the film *Total Recall*. He performs in his one man show *Frederick Douglass in the Shadow of Slavery*, and has appeared on Broadway in *On the Twentieth Century*, *Eubie!* with Gregory and Maurice Hines, and *The Rink* with Liza Minnelli and Chita Rivera. He was Mustafa in *The Lion King*.

David Alan Bunn was music director for the critically acclaimed production of *Sophisticated Ladies* with Maurice Hines at Lincoln Theatre. He was music director and arranger for *Rollin' on the T.O.B.A.* off and on Broadway, and has music directed for Michael Buble, Jennifer Holiday, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Ruben Studdard, Stephanie Mills, Melba Moore and Leslie Uggams.

Zurin Villanueva will play Josephine Baker. She most recently played Charlayne in *Ain't Misbehavin'* directed by original cast member Andre DeShields at Crossroads Theatre in New Jersey. She graduated from Howard University's Musical Theatre program and was the winner of the "Finding Yolanda" search for Arena Stage's 2009 production of *Crowns*. While she was still a student, he actually had her first paying job at MetroStage in *The Stephen Schwartz Project* in 2008.

Aisha de Haas will play both Josephine's mother, Carrie MacDonald, and the vaudeville performer Big Bertha Smith. She was most recently seen in Nora Ephron's Off Broadway hit *Love Loss & What I Wore*. She was "The Moon" in Broadway's *Caroline, Or Change*, and she performed in *Rent* on Broadway and in the film.

James T. Lane will play both Eddie Baker and Josephine's French lover, Paul Colin. He was last seen in the Tony nominated production of *The Scottsboro Boys* on Broadway. He performed with the New York Pops at Carnegie Hall's in *Irving Berlin: From*

Ragtime to Ritzes and, most recently, was Barnaby Tucker in Indianapolis Symphony's *Hello Dolly*.

Debra Walton plays multiple characters including the vaudeville performer Mother Jones. Her recent shows include *Beehive!*, where she was able to pay tribute to one of her childhood idols Tina Turner, and *Ain't Misbehavin's* 30th Anniversary performance in Los Angeles, in the role of Charlayne sharing the stage with some of the show's original cast members. She is best known for the multi-character roles she created in *Cookin' at the Cookery*, *The Life and Times of Alberta Hunter*, for which she received a Drama Desk nomination.

James Alexander, who plays multiple characters, including the vaudeville performer Father Jones, was recently seen in the production of *A Matinee in Harlem*, directed by George Faison. He toured in the Broadway National production of *Little Shop of Horrors*, directed by Jerry Zaks and choreographed by Kathleen Marshall. He is also a New York based natural light photographer (SneakPeek Photography), whose work is featured on the postcard for **Josephine Tonight**.

Designers are: Klyph Stanford, set and projections; Reggie Ray, costumes; and Jessica Winfield, lights.

Performances are Thursdays and Fridays at 8, Saturdays at 3 and 8, Sundays at 3 and 7. PWYC is Thursday Jan. 26 and Press Night is Saturday, Feb. 4 at 8 pm. MetroStage is located at 1201 N. Royal St. in Alexandria, Virginia in North Old Town. Tickets may be ordered by calling 1-800-494-8497 or online at boxofficetickets.com. For group sales and information call the theatre at 703-548-9044. The theatre's website is www.metrostage.org.