PRESS RELEASE
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Syracuse Stage opens season with world premiere

SYRACUSE, NY – Syracuse Stage opens the 2019/2020 season with the world premiere production of “Thoughts of a Colored Man.” Performance dates are Sept. 4 through 22. Tickets are available at www.SyracuseStage.org or at the Box Office (315)-443-3275.

Written by Keenan Scott II and directed by Steve H. Broadnax III, “Thoughts of a Colored Man” is co-produced with Baltimore Center Stage and two commercial producers, Brian Moreland and Ron Simons. Moreland and Simons anticipate moving the production to New York after its run in Syracuse and Baltimore.

The cast is led by Jerome Preston Bates (“American Son”), Brandon Dion Gregory (“Let The Church Say Amen”) Tony Award® nominee Forrest McClendon (“The Scottsboro Boys”), Reynaldo Piniella (“The Death of the Last Black Man”), Ryan Jamaal Swain (FX’s “Pose”), Jody Reynard (“Summer”) and Garrett Turner (“Half Time”). They are joined by dancers Ashley Pierre-Louis and Hollie E. Wright and DJ Chesney Snow (“In Transit”).

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The production will also have music by Te’La and Brother Kamau, set design by Tony nominee Robert Brill (“Ain’t Too Proud”), costume design by Tony nominee and Drama Desk winner Toni-Leslie James (“Come From Away”) and Devario D. Simmons (“In The Next Room” at Theatre VCU), lighting design by Ryan O’Gara (“A Night with Janis Joplin” national tour), projection design by Tony and Drama Desk nominee Sven Ortel (“Newsies”), and sound design by Mikaal Sulaiman (“Fires in the Mirror” at Signature Theatre Company). Casting is by Calleri Casting.

As the sun rises on an ordinary day in New York, seven men are about to discover the extraordinary. “Thoughts of a Colored Man” blends powerful language, music and dance into a daringly universal new play. Welcome to the vibrant inner life of being Black, proud and thriving in the 21st Century. Set over a single day, this richly theatrical mosaic goes beyond the rhythms of the basketball court and the boisterousness of the barbershop. It sheds brilliant light into the hearts and minds of a community of men searching for their most triumphant selves. And what they reveal are the deeply human hopes, dreams, fears and sensitivities of all men, all people.

The Syracuse Stage production of “Thoughts of a Colored Man” is an important step in the play’s development. With the producers’ ambition for a potential Broadway production, the Syracuse Stage run is in many respects akin to the out-of-town tryouts of an earlier theatrical era when producers previewed shows for audiences in Boston or Philadelphia before moving to New York. Nowadays, it is increasingly common for commercial producers to partner with not-for-profit regional theaters like Syracuse Stage to ready new plays for a New York opening. But what is crucial remains the same: the chance to perform a new work in front of an audience is the only way the show’s creators and backers can really know whether it works or not.

“As a producer, I needed to find partners that share a hunger for new work with a willingness to be bold and daring,” Moreland explained. “Coming to Syracuse Stage provides just that bold and daring opportunity for a new play to succeed. It is exciting because Syracuse Stage patrons get a rare opportunity to see a show being developed for Broadway and an opportunity to play an active part in a new show’s life.”

Syracuse Stage is presenting “Thoughts of a Colored Man” under the artistic umbrella of Cold Read, the term designating new work at the theatre, as in the Cold Read Festival of New Plays, now in its third year, and last season’s production of “Possessing Harriet.” For artistic director Bob Hupp and associate artistic director Kyle Bass, the ability to present new plays is essential to the artistic vitality of Syracuse Stage.

“Our mission is to bring engaging and diverse stories to life on stage for our Central New York audience,” said Hupp. “The exciting and accomplished team of actors and creative artists assembled for this premiere embody Stage’s commitment to artistic excellence. Following last season’s much-lauded premiere of ‘Possessing Harriet,’ I’m thrilled to include a new play in our 47th season. New plays are the lifeblood of our craft, and ‘Thoughts of a Colored Man’ is the perfect complement to a season that includes classics, crowd pleasers and appealing contemporary works.”

In addition, presenting “Thoughts of a Colored Man” allows Syracuse Stage to foster partnerships with community organizations. Centerstate CEO/Generation Next, 100 Black Men of Syracuse and Hillside Work Scholarship Connection will participate in events related to the production.

Director Broadnax is well-known to Hupp, the pair having worked together while Hupp was artistic director of Arkansas Repertory Theater. Broadnax’s recent credits include two plays by Dominique Morrisseau, “Pipeline” at Actors Theatre of Louisville and “Blood at the Root” at National Black Theatre. He is slated to direct the world premiere of “The Hot Wing King” by Katori Hall at New York’s Signature Theatre in early 2020. Broadnax took over directing duties from Syracuse University alumni Taye Diggs.
Originally slated to direct “Thoughts of a Colored Man,” Diggs had to leave the project due to his shooting schedule for “All American,” which was renewed for a second season on The CW.

In Keenan Scott II, Moreland believes he has found a new and important voice whose writing has touched him personally.

“Keenan Scott II is a young man with an old soul and giant vision,” Moreland explained. “He writes for our present day experiences. A playwright who writes from the view point of ‘now’ and who has an uncanny way of creating dialogue that allows me to ask hard questions and explore cultures in an open way. I was immediately drawn to ‘Thoughts of a Colored Man’ because the show gave me an experience and understanding of human beings I have grown up with. Never having seen these humans on a stage sharing their lives, I was drawn and compelled to share it.”

“Thoughts of a Colored Man”
By Keenan Scott II
In association with Brian Moreland and Ron Simons
Directed by Steve H. Broadnax III
Choreography by Millicent Marie Johnnie
Scenic Design by Robert Brill
Costume Design by Toni-Leslie James and Devario Simmons
Lighting Design by Ryan O’Gara
Sound Design by Mikaal Sulaiman
Projection Design by Sven Ortel
Production Stage Manager: B.J. Forman
Casting: Calleri Casting
Co-produced with Baltimore Center Stage

Cast
Jerome Preston Bates......................................................................................................................................................... Wisdom
Brandon Dion Gregory ....................................................................................................................................................... Passion
Forrest McClendon....................................................................................................................................................... Depression
Reynaldo Piniella............................................................................................................................................................. Lust
Jody Reynard..................................................................................................................................................................... Happiness
Ryan Jamaal Swain............................................................................................................................................................ Love
Garrett Turner ................................................................................................................................................................... Anger
Ashley Pierre-Louis ............................................................................................................................................................ Dancer
Hollie Wright ..................................................................................................................................................................... Dancer
Chesney Snow ..................................................................................................................................................................... DJ

Cast Biographies
As a writer, he penned the plays “Augusta Brown” and “Electric Lady,” and the “Jimi Hendrix” screenplay. He directed “The Man in Room 306” at Luna Stage, and both “Easy Money” and “A Salute to August Wilson: Religion” at the Billie Holiday Theatre. Thank you to Syracuse Stage and Center Stage and the TOACM team. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Brandon Dion Gregory (Passion) was born and raised in Stone Mountain, Georgia. The New York Times caught Gregory being a whole lot of “fun” on stage in the holiday classic: “Christmas Carol in Harlem.” This year, you will get to witness him create more magic with this incredibly talented cast and crew. Gregory loves the constant balance of art and business. He has a Bachelor’s in Management and a Master’s in Theatre. His favorite stage roles include his work in “Argonautika” as Jason and “Twelfth Night” as Sir Toby. You may have also seen him on Netflix’s “Let the Church Say Amen,” Showtime’s “Homeland,” ABC’s “Resurrection,” or on the N train the other day.

Forrest McClendon (Depression) is an internationally acclaimed award-winning actor and singer. He most recently was seen as The Emcee in “Cabaret” at Connecticut Repertory Theatre, and as Dude in “Cabin in the Sky,” directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson at City Center Encores! He received a Tony Award nomination for his Broadway debut as Mr. Tambo in “The Scottsboro Boys” directed by Susan Stroman and he recently starred in the musical’s UK premiere, which won the London Evening Standard Award for Best Musical. He is featured on both the Off-Broadway and Abbey Road cast recordings. His notable regional performances include “The America Play” (B. Iden Payne Award), “Avenue X” (Barrymore Award), “Seven Guitars” (Actors Theatre of Louisville), “Wild With Happy” (Baltimore Center Stage), “Romeo and Juliet” (North Carolina Shakespeare Festival), “Othello” (Philadelphia Shakespeare Theatre), and “Julius Caesar” (Lantern Theater Company).

Reynaldo Piniella (Lust) was previously seen in “The Death of the Last Black Man...,” “Venus” (Signature Theatre Company), “The Skin of Our Teeth” (Theatre for A New Audience), “The Space Between the Letters” (The Public Theater’s Under the Radar Festival), “Terminus” (NYTW Next Door), “Lockdown” (Rattlestick), “Romeo and Juliet” (Shakespeare Festival St. Louis, Actors Theatre of Louisville). Film credits include “Madeline’s Madeline,” “Broken City,” “One Percent More Humid,” and “Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close.” Television credits include “Sneaky Pete,” “Law & Order: SVU,” “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart,” “Flesh & Bone,” “NYC 22,” and “The Carrie Diaries.” He received the Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellowship from TCG. Follow him on Instagram and Twitter @ReynaldoRey.

Jody Reynard (Happiness). Broadway credits include “Summer,” “Legally Blonde,” “Taboo,” “Saturday Night Fever,” and “Fosse.” National tour credits include “Memphis,” “Kiss Me, Kate,” “Camelot,” and “My Fair Lady.” Regional credits include “West Side Story,” “25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee,” “La Cage aux Folles,” “Smokey Joe’s Café,” and “Take Me Out.” Film and television credits include “The Oprah Winfrey Show,” “Rosie Live,” “One Life to Live,” “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” and “Show Business: The Road to Broadway.” Reynard has performed in concerts with the Omaha Symphony and the New York Philharmonic.

Ryan Jamaal Swain (Love) currently stars as Damon, in Ryan Murphy's Emmy and Golden Globe nominated series “Pose” on FX. Ryan was just named to Forbes Magazine’s coveted “30 Under 30” list for his LGBTQ+ activism. He made his Broadway debut in Tarrell Alvin McCraney’s “Choir Boy” earlier this year. Prior to making his small screen and Broadway debut, Swain made a name for himself performing in numerous theatrical productions including Paul in “Six Degrees of Separation” (Keegan Theatre, Washington D.C.), Jasen in the world premiere of “295N” (Signature Theatre, Washington, D.C.), Wisdom in “Thoughts of a Colored Man” (GALA Hispanic Theatre), and Moritz in “Spring Awakening” (City Equity Theater, Birmingham, Alabama).

Ashley Pierre-Louis (Dancer). Credits include “March Under an Empty Reign” at the Joyce Theater and “Poem Part 1” at the Kennedy Center. Her numerous dance roles at Florida’s Fichter Dance Theatre include “Shelter,” “Walking With ‘Trane, Walking With Pearl... Southern Diaries,” and “Webbed Fugues.” Ashley is a graduate of Florida State University’s Dance program and trained at San Francisco’s Conservatory of Dance.

Hollie E. Wright (Dancer) has recently been seen in “Cabin in the Sky” at City Center Encores! Her Broadway and national tour credits include “Amazing Grace,” “Hot Feet,” and “The Color Purple.” Regionally, she has appeared in “Jesus Christ Superstar” (Alliance Theatre), “Sophisticated Ladies” (Arena Stages), and “Oklahoma!” (Arena Stages). Her television and film credits include “Black Girls Rock,” “Glee,” “Louisi,” and “Beloved.” Wright was a principal dancer for Philadanco.

Special Events
Sept. 4 Pay-What-You-Will Performance @ 7:30 p.m.
There will be 76 tickets available for whatever price patrons wish to pay. Pay-what-you-will tickets must be claimed in person at the Box Office on the day of the performance, subject to availability. The Box Office opens at 10 a.m. and will remain open until the start of the show. There is a limit of two tickets per person.

Sept. 6 Opening Night Party (free for ticket holders)
Join the cast for a post-show celebration with live music presented by CNY Jazz, food and drinks.

Sept. 8 Prologue at 1 p.m. (free for ticket holders)
An intimate, pre-show discussion with “Thoughts of a Colored Man” actors one hour prior to curtain. Prologues will be held in the classroom in room 141.

Sept. 11 Wednesday @ 1 Discussion (free for ticket holders)
Join Syracuse Stage for a special Wednesday @ 1 discussion with “Thoughts of a Colored Man” playwright Keenan Scott II and director Steve H. Broadnax III, moderated by Syracuse Stage Associate Artistic Director Kyle Bass.

Open Captioning at 2 p.m. Performance for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Sept. 12 Happy Hour at 6 p.m. (free for ticket holders)
Enjoy complimentary light fare from local restaurants, half-priced drinks and $5 drink specials at the bar.

Sept. 14 Prologue at 1 p.m. (free for ticket holders)
An intimate, pre-show discussion with “Thoughts of a Colored Man” actors one hour prior to curtain. Prologues will be held in the classroom in room 141.
ASL Interpreted Performance at 3 p.m. for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Sept. 15  Actor Talkback (free for ticket holders)
A Q&A session with the actors following the 7 p.m. performance. The talkback will be held in the Archbold Theatre.

Sept. 18  Dinner & Show ($60, includes dinner and show admission)
Enjoy a buffet dinner at 6 p.m. with fellow theatre lovers in the Sutton Pavilion. Seasonal fare prepared by Phoebe’s Restaurant followed by great theatre.

Sept. 19  Prologue at 6:30 p.m. (free for ticket holders)
An intimate, pre-show discussion with “Thoughts of a Colored Man” actors one hour prior to curtain. Prologues will be held in the classroom in room 141.

Sept. 20  Last Call
The Syracuse Stage bar will remain open after the show. Mix and mingle with fellow patrons—the perfect chance to chat about the show!

Sept. 21  Audio Described Performance at 2 p.m. for patrons who are blind or visually impaired.

Open Captioning at 7:30 p.m. performance for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Sept. 22  Poetry & Play @ 1 p.m. (free for ticket holders)
Join Syracuse Stage for a poetry series that connects the literary arts to the work on the stage. Featured authors will be announced at a later date.

Open Captioning at 2 p.m. performance for patrons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

ABOUT SYRACUSE STAGE
Founded in 1974, Syracuse Stage is the non-profit, professional theatre company in residence at Syracuse University. It is nationally recognized for creating stimulating theatrical work that engages Central New York and significantly contributes to the artistic life of Syracuse University, where it is a vital partner in achieving the educational mission of the University’s Department of Drama. Syracuse Stage’s mission is to tell stories that engage, entertain and inspire people to see life beyond their own experience. Each season 70,000 patrons enjoy an adventurous mix of new plays, and bold interpretations of classics and musicals, featuring the finest theatre artists. In addition, Stage maintains a vital educational outreach program that annually serves more than 15,000 students from 14 counties. Syracuse Stage is a constituent of the Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre, and a member of the Arts and Cultural Leadership Alliance (ACLA), the University Hill Corporation and the East Genesee Regent Association. Syracuse Stage is a member of The League of Resident Theatres (LORT), the largest professional theatre association in the country.

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