



PRESS CONTACT: Thom Trick
503-432-2950
thomt@pcs.org

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**PORTLAND CENTER STAGE'S *CROWNS*
CELEBRATES THE STRENGTH AND SPIRIT
OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN AND THEIR HATS**

Smash-hit musical play combines a soaring gospel score with tales of "hattitude"

PORTLAND CENTER STAGE is raising the roof with soaring gospel music and a whole lot of "hattitude" in Regina Taylor's soul-stirring, smash-hit musical play, *Crowns*. Adapted by playwright **Regina Taylor** from the acclaimed book "**Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats**" by **Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry**, *Crowns*, showcases the deeply-rooted faith and high-spirited style of African-American women, embodied in the fabulous hats they wear to church every Sunday. *Crowns*, directed by **Andrea Frye**, previews at the Newmark Theatre, 1111 SW Broadway at Main, Tuesday, March 14 - Thursday, March 16; opens Friday, March 17 and closes with the 2 PM matinee on Sunday, April 9. Evening performances take place at 7 PM Tuesday, Wednesday, Sunday and 8 PM Thursday, Friday, Saturday while Noon Thursday and 2 PM Saturday and Sunday matinee dates are also available. Tickets: \$15, 30+under, \$20 - \$56, others; box office: 503-274-6588; information: www.pcs.org. This year, second balcony seats for every PCS production are only \$20. The fifth production in PCS' 05-06 **McDonald Financial Group Main Stage Series**, *Crowns* is sponsored by **Merrill Corporation** and **Stoel Rives, LLP**, with additional support from the **Regional Arts and Culture Council**.

On Tuesday, March 14, **Chrysalis Ministries**, in association with Portland Center Stage, presents **Crowned Jewels**, a fundraiser to benefit **African-American Women for Breast Cancer Awareness, Prevention and Education**. The event begins at 5 pm with a reception featuring musical entertainment and a display of the hats and photographs of African-American women in our community who have survived breast cancer, followed by a performance of Portland Center Stage's production of *Crowns*. Tickets for this event are \$50.00 and can be purchased by calling the PCS Box Office at 503/274-6588. Tickets are also available at Niché (503/920-0108), Talking Drum, 446 NE Killingsworth, Portland (503/288-4070) and Novella's Beauty Supply, 12230 SW Broadway St., Beaverton (503/643-3553). This event is sponsored by The Susan G. Komen Foundation - OR & SW WA Affiliates, Multnomah County - Breast and Cervical Cancer Program, Melodies from Heaven (KKSL 1290AM), Zion Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Photography by Reba, World Arts Foundation, Inc., Senator Avel Gordly, The Hat Museum, Services for Humanity and *The Portland Observer*.

This gospel music-infused play celebrates the tradition, style and grace of African-American women through the story of Yolanda, a tough African-American girl from Brooklyn who is sent to live with her

grandmother in South Carolina after the violent death of her brother. Through "Mother Shaw" and her empowering "hat queen" friends, Yolanda comes to understand the importance of keeping traditions of the past alive, including the unique significance that hats have among African-American women. Brought to America by the first African slaves, the tribal traditions of imposing headdress for the most important tribesmen has evolved through the centuries to the magnificent hats proudly worn throughout the country today at weekly church services.

Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry's acclaimed book "Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats" captures the oral histories of fifty women ranging from feisty *twentysomethings* to serene grandmothers. From the beginning, Marberry believed his collection of oral histories would translate well to the stage and touch a variety of audiences. "Most of the dialogue in the play comes directly from the oral histories in my book," Marberry said. "So these are the stories of real women-proud, elegant, charming women who touched my heart."

A sold-out hit in theatres across the country from New England to California, and from Seattle to Miami, *Crowns* arrives in Portland from a hugely successful run at Arizona Theatre Company. A co-production with Arizona Theatre Company and the Actors Theatre of Louisville, *Crowns* will complete its tour in Louisville, where it will run from April 19 through May 14, 2006.

Playwright Regina Taylor received Helen Hayes and Audelco Awards for *Crowns*, which premiered at the McCarter Theatre and Second Stage in Princeton, NJ in 2002. Ms. Taylor is resident playwright at Alliance Theatre Company in Atlanta and is developing a play based on Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard* set in Atlanta in 1962 entitled *Magnolia*. Her other plays include *Oobladee*, *Watermelon Rinds*, *Inside the Belly of the Beast*, *Urban Zulu Mambo*, *Escape from Paradise* and *A Night in Tunisia*.

Andrea Frye recently completed a six year stint at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival where she directed acclaimed productions of *A Raisin in the Sun* and Nilo Cruz's *Two Sisters and a Piano*. She also recently directed *Jar the Floor* for Alliance Theatre Company and was last scene by Portland Center Stage audiences in 2001's highly acclaimed production of *For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide When a Rainbow Was Enough*. Ms. Frye has also directed critically acclaimed productions of *Home for Jomandi* and *Valley Song* for Alliance Theatre. Other directing credits include *Come and Gone*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, *The Screened-in Porch*, *The Ties That Bind*, *Do Lord Remember Me*, *The Colored Museum*, *Buried Children*, *She'll Find Her Way Home* and *Spunk*.

Also returning to Portland Center Stage is **Crystal Fox** (Yolanda) who played Lady in Red in *For Colored Girls*... Other credits include Marie in an off-Broadway production of *Everybody's Ruby* and regional theatre credits in performances at True Colors Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Merrimack Theatre Company and Alliance Theatre Company. Making their PCS debuts are **Pat Bowie** (Mother Shaw) who just completed a tour of *Flyin' West* as Miss Leah, and whose Broadway credits include Mrs. Zulu in *The Song of Jacob Zulu*; **Thomas Jefferson Byrd** (Man) who played the role of Toledo in August Wilson's **Ma Rainey's Black Bottom** on Broadway; **Angela Carol Grovey** (Wanda) who returns to *Crowns*, previously playing the role of Mabel at Arena Stage, Geva Theatre and Studio Arena Theatre; **Julia Lema** (Mabel) whose regional credits include *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Swinging on a Star*, *Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music*, *Play On!*, *Dreamgirls*, and *Blues in the Night*; and **Erika LaVonn** (Velma) who has performed in Chicago, Australia and Broadway productions of *Steppenwolf*

Theatre's *The Song of Jacob Zulu* and recently performed in Disney's Broadway show, *The Lion King*, for three and a half years.

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The artistic team includes **James Calhoun** (Music Director) who has served as church organist, conductor and coordinator of music ministries at the historic Second Baptist Church, Los Angeles for more than 21 years; **Mercedes Ellington** (Choreographer) whose Broadway credits include *Sophisticated Ladies*, *Play On!*, *Harry Chapin's The Night That Made America Famous*, *The Grand Tour* and *No, No, Nanette*; **Marjorie Bradley Kellogg**, (Scenic Designer) whose Broadway credits include *Any Given Day*, *On Borrowed Time*, *Lucifer's Child*, *American Buffalo*, *Da*, *Requiem For a Heavyweight*, *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, *Soloman's Child*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Steaming* and *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*; **Reggie Ray** (Costume Designer), recipient of seven Woodie King Awards for Outstanding Costume Design for *The Colored Museum*, *Blues in the Night*, *Urban Transition/Loose Blossoms*, *Screened in Porch* and *The Wiz*; **Dawn Chiang** (Lighting Designer), who was resident lighting designer for New York City Opera and whose Broadway credits include *Zoot Suit* and *Tango Passion* (co-designed with Richard Pilbrow); **Brian Jerome Peterson**, Resident Sound Designer at Arizona Theatre Company; and PCS Stage Manager **Mark Tynan**.*

Crowns by Regina Taylor
Portland Center Stage • Newmark Theatre • 1111 SW Broadway • Tickets: \$15 – \$56
Box Office: 503-274-6588 • www.pcs.org

Performance Schedule and Special Events

<u>Evenings</u>	7 PM		8 PM
Tuesdays	Mar 14 (P), 21, 28, Apr 4	Thursdays	Mar 16 (P), 23, 30, Apr 6
Wednesdays	Mar 15 (P), 22, 29, Apr 5	Fridays	Mar 17 (O), 24, 31 Apr 7
Sundays	Mar 19, 26, Apr 2	Saturdays	Mar 18, 25 Apr 1, 8
<u>Matinées</u>	2 PM		Noon
Sundays	Mar 19, 26 Apr 2, 9 (C)	Thursdays	Mar 23, 30, Apr 6
Saturday	Apr 8		
(P) = Preview • (O) = Opens • (C) = Closes		Run time: 2 hours	

Q&A

Thursdays, March 23 & 30 Noon Third floor Gallery
 Discuss the play in an open dialogue with members of the company, immediately following the performance.

Access Performances

<u>Audio Described</u>	<u>Sign Interpreted</u>
Friday, March 24 8 PM	Thursday, March 30 8 PM

The Newmark is fully accessible for all people with disabilities. Large print programs and assistive listening devices are available from the coatroom, **free** of charge.

Forum

Sunday, March 26 2 PM Third floor Gallery
 Join special guests for a conversation about “Fashion as Statement.” Immediately following the matinée.

PORTLAND CENTER STAGE, founded in 1988 and a resident company of the Portland Center for the Performing Arts, attracts more than 90,000 theatergoers annually. With five mainstage and two second stage productions each season, PCS produces a blend of classical, contemporary and world premiere works in addition to its annual summer playwrights’ festival, Just Add Water/West. PCS has embarked upon a \$36.1 million capital campaign to renovate the historic Portland Armory and create a permanent home for the company. The new facility, recently named the Bob and Diana Gerding Theater, will house a 599-seat mainstage and a 200-seat black box theater and is being designed to be the first historic rehabilitation, and hopes to be the first performing arts venue, to achieve a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum rating. To date, more than \$24 million has been secured for the project. The Gerding Theater will open on September 30, 2006. PCS’s remaining 2005 - 2006 season comprises:

- Itamar Moses, *Celebrity Row*, March 21 – April 16, 2006 -- **World Premiere**