



PRESS CONTACT: Natalie Genter-Gilmore
503.445.3765
natalieg@pcs.org

M E D I A R E L E A S E

FIND THE SONGS AT THE HEART OF AMERICA'S HIDDEN HISTORY IN

BLACK PEARL SINGS! AT PORTLAND CENTER STAGE

previews begin April 24, 2012 in the Ellyn Bye Studio

April 3, 2012 – PORTLAND, ORE. Delve into American history through the forgotten folk songs of former slaves with Portland Center Stage's production of *Black Pearl Sings!* by Frank Higgins and directed by Bill Fennelly. *Black Pearl Sings!* begins preview performances on Tuesday, April 24, opens on **Friday, April 27** and runs Tuesday through Sunday through **June 17, 2012**. Tickets **start at \$36**, with student and under-30 discounts also available. Rush tickets are \$20.

Show times are 7:30 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, with 2 p.m. matinees on Saturdays and Sundays and matinees at noon on select Thursdays. See the show calendar at www.pcs.org/black-pearl for the complete performance schedule. Tickets can be purchased online at www.pcs.org, by phone at 503.445.3700 or by visiting the box office located at 128 NW Eleventh Avenue.

In 1935 Texas, Susannah, an academic and song collector for the Library of Congress, visits a high-security prison where she meets Pearl, an African-American woman imprisoned for murder who longs to leave prison and find her lost daughter. Hoping to record the treasure trove of spirituals and African folk songs that only Pearl knows—and make her reputation on the discoveries—Susannah bargains for Pearl's parole and arranges for several public performances. Featuring beautiful a cappella renditions of little-known American folk songs, Director Bill Fennelly describes the play as, "about memory. Memory is power. It's our connection to our ancestors, family and those people who have come before us." The two women soon find themselves walking a delicate line between exposure and exploitation. *Black Pearl Sings!* chronicles a powerful story about fighting for one's soul in a world where anyone can be a commodity.

Alberta “Pearl” Johnson will be played by **Chavez Ravine**. A newcomer to Portland Center Stage, Ms. Ravine is a native of Chicago and has appeared off-Broadway in Steppenwolf Theatre’s *The Bluest Eye*. Regionally, Ms. Ravine as appeared in such plays as *Yellowman*, *Spunk*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *Civil War Voices*, *Crowns* and *American Voices*. Also making her PCS debut, **Lena Kaminsky** will be playing the role of Susannah Mullally. Ms. Kaminsky has previously been seen in such plays as *Love, Janis*; *Trying*; *The Pillowman*; *Doubt*; *Taming of the Shrew*; *The Weir* and *Love and Communication*.

Scenic Designer **Andrew Boyce** will recreate the space within the Ellyn Bye Studio to evoke a southern Texas jail and the 1930’s Greenwich Village apartment. Costume Designer **Jeff Cone** will design the depression-era costumes. Sound Designer **Casi Pacilio**, Lighting Designer **Thom Weaver** and Stage Manager **Mark Tynan** round out the creative team.

Additional support for this production has been provided by **Dream Envision Foundation**. Portland Center Stage's 2011/12 season is funded in part by **Umpqua Private Bank**, our lead corporate champion; the **Regional Arts & Culture Council** and **Work for Art**; the **Oregon Arts Commission**; the **Paul G. Allen Family Foundation**; and **Tim & Mary Boyle**. The Mark Spencer Hotel is the official hotel partner of Portland Center Stage.

[PORTLAND CENTER STAGE](#) inspires our community by bringing stories to life in unexpected ways. Established in 1988 as a branch of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, PCS became an independent theater in 1994 and has been under the leadership of Artistic Director Chris Coleman since May 2000. The company presents a blend of classic, contemporary and original productions in a conscious effort to appeal to the eclectic palate of theatergoers in Portland. PCS also offers a variety of education and outreach programs for curious minds from six to 106, including discussions, classes, workshops and partnerships with organizations throughout the Portland metro area.

THE GERDING THEATER AT THE ARMORY houses a 599-seat Main Stage and the 200-seat black box Ellyn Bye Studio. It was the first building on the National Register of Historic Places, and the first performing arts venue, to achieve a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum certification. The Gerding Theater at the Armory opened to the public on Oct. 1, 2006. The capital campaign to fund the renovation of this hub for community artistic activity continues.

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