Center Stage to Produce World Premiere Musical Based on Bob Marley

Written and directed by Kwame Kwei-Armah, Marley is a collaboration between Baltimore’s Center Stage and The Public Theater in New York City

Baltimore, MD—August 19, 2014. Center Stage, the State Theater of Maryland, announced today that it will produce the world premiere of Marley, the first original musical based on both the life and music of cultural icon Bob Marley. With a book and direction by Center Stage artistic director Kwame Kwei-Armah, Marley will run from May 6 to June 14, 2015 to close Center Stage’s 2014/15 season.

Marley explores a pivotal period in the singer’s life. In 1976, Bob Marley finds himself the target of an assassination attempt. Shaken by this act of violence in the country he loves, Marley leaves for London where he spends nearly two years in self-imposed exile. Chronicling the events surrounding this earth-shaking moment, Marley tells the story of a man transformed into one of the 20th Century’s greatest musical icons.

Through an agreement with Blue Mountain Music and Tuff Gong Pictures, Marley will feature music composed by Bob Marley—including, among others, songs from Exodus, Kaya, and Rastaman Vibration, which were written during the period in which the production is set.

“I came to truly appreciate Bob Marley during my own period of transformation as an artist,” Kwei-Armah says. “Writing this piece is my way of paying tribute to all that I’ve learned from Marley over the years, and it is very humbling to have the opportunity to bring his story to the stage.”

“We are thrilled to be working both with Kwame and with Center Stage to bring part of our father’s story to life in a way that has never been done before,” Cedella Marley says. “When it comes to our father’s work and legacy, we have always been mindful in selecting the artists with whom we choose to collaborate. We couldn’t be more excited about the team that is assembled for this project.”

Kwei-Armah, a playwright, director, and international arts advocate, came into prominence in his native England as an actor and playwright. He is the author of plays such as A Bitter Herb, Seize the Day, Let There Be Love, and Beneatha’s Place, the latter of which was written as a response to Clybourne Park for Center Stage’s The Raisin Cycle, which was the subject of a nationally broadcast PBS documentary, “A Raisin in the Sun Revisited: The Raisin Cycle at Center Stage.” Kwei-Armah serves as Chancellor of the University of the Arts London and was named an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in 2012.

Marley will be a creative collaboration between Baltimore’s Center Stage and New York City’s The Public Theater, with Artistic Director of The Public Theater Oskar Eustis serving as dramaturg for the production. Kwei-Armah directed two shows at The Public in 2013—the Mobile Shakespeare Lab production of Much Ado About Nothing and the Public Lab production of Dominique Morisseau’s Detroit ’67.

“For this piece, I wanted to collaborate with the very best minds,” Kwei-Armah says. “Having Oskar on board will give me the best chance a writer can have at fulfilling the potential of this piece.”

“Bob Marley was one of the great artists of the 20th Century, and a powerful and inspiring social leader,” Eustis says. “I am thrilled to be working again with an artist as talented as Kwame Kwei-Armah to bring his story to a new generation. Kwame has the intelligence, the talent, and the leadership to match Marley’s.”

“With each season Kwame has put together, he’s taken our audience on an extraordinary journey,” Center Stage Managing Director Stephen Richard says. “It’s only fitting that for the end of a season about discovery, Kwame has crafted a wonderful opportunity to explore the legacy and impact of such an incredible artist. This season is the perfect time for this large-scale
musical to come to fruition, and we at Center Stage can’t wait to share it with the world.”

The full cast and creative team for Marley will be announced at a later date.

With the theme “Step into New Worlds,” Center Stage’s 2014/15 Season begins with Amadeus on Sept. 10.

Marley
Music and Lyrics by Bob Marley
Book by Kwame Kwei-Armah
May 6–June 14, 2015

From Center Stage Artistic Director Kwame Kwei-Armah, comes a world premiere musical based on the life and music Bob Marley. After a failed attempt on his life, Marley left Jamaica in 1976 for London, where he spent nearly two years in self-imposed exile. Chronicling the events surrounding this earth-shaking moment, Marley tells the story of a man transformed into one of the 20th Century’s greatest musical icons. Set in the soundscape of an era, this new musical weaves together the life and music of a man who, to heal himself, first healed his homeland.

About Bob Marley
Bob Marley is one of the most important and influential artists of the 20th Century. In the digital era, Marley has the second-highest social media following of any posthumous celebrity, with the official Bob Marley Facebook page now surpassing 69 million fans, ranking it among the Top 20 of all Facebook pages and Top 10 among celebrity pages. His music catalog has sold more than 50 million albums worldwide since 1992 and his accolades continue, including an induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (1994), a GRAMMY® Lifetime Achievement Award (2001), multiple entries in the GRAMMY® Hall Of Fame and the Hollywood Walk of Fame (2001). Bob Marley was the first Jamaican artist to gain worldwide fame. A musical, political and even spiritual icon, a figure of almost mystical proportions, no artist has so dominated his genre in the history of modern music as Marley has reggae. For more information on Bob Marley, visit: www.bobmarley.com.

About Kwame Kwei-Armah OBE
Kwame Kwei-Armah OBE, an award-winning British playwright, director, actor, and broadcaster, is in his fourth season as artistic director of Center Stage in Baltimore, Maryland. At Center Stage he has directed dance of the holy ghosts (Baltimore City Paper Top Ten Productions of 2013); The Mountaintop; An Enemy of the People; The Whipping Man (City Paper Top Ten Productions of 2012), for which he was named Best Director; and Naomi Wallace’s Things of Dry Hours. Among his works as playwright are Elmina’s Kitchen and Let There Be Love — which had their American debuts at Center Stage — as well as A Bitter Herb and Statement of Regret. His latest play, Beneatha’s Place, debuted at Center Stage in 2013 as part of the ground-breaking Raisin Cycle. His other directorial credits include Let There Be Love and Seize the Day at the Tricycle Theatre, Dominique Morisseau’s Skeleton Crew at the Lark Play Development Center in New York, New York’s Public Theater’s production of Much Ado About Nothing, the world premiere of Detroit ’67 (nominated for Best Director) at The Public Theater, and the world premiere of The Liquid Plain at Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Kwame has served on the boards of The National Theatre and The Tricycle Theatre, both in London. He served as artistic director for the World Arts Festival in Senegal, a month-long world festival of black arts and culture, which featured more than 2,000 artists from 52 countries participating in 16 different arts disciplines. He was named the chancellor of the University of the Arts London, and in 2012 was named an officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

About Center Stage
Under the leadership of playwright, actor, and director Kwame Kwei-Armah OBE (Artistic Director) and national arts leader Stephen Richard (Managing Director), Center Stage is an artistically driven institution committed to engaging, entertaining, and enriching audiences through joyous and bold performances. Hailed by The Wall Street Journal as “a model of what regional theater can and should be,” Center Stage has, for more than 50 years, dedicated itself to exploring new works and bringing classics to life. This rich history is marked by critically acclaimed new works that have shaped the American theater— from the Tony Award-winning The Triumph of Love to world premieres such as Miss Evers’ Boys by
David Feldshuh and *On the Verge* by Eric Overmyer. In 2013, Center Stage’s unprecedented presentation of the Tony Award-winning *Clybourne Park* in repertory with the world premiere of Kwei-Armah’s *Beneatha’s Place* sparked dialogue, drew international media attention, and became the subject of a nationally broadcast PBS documentary, “*A Raisin in the Sun Revisited: The Raisin Cycle at Center Stage*.” With its signature focus on civic and community engagement, Center Stage enters its 52nd season with a commitment to exploring how art and entertainment communicate in the 21st Century and to igniting conversation in Baltimore and beyond.

**About The Public Theater at Astor Place**

Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public Theater is the only theater in New York that produces Shakespeare, the classics, musicals, contemporary, and experimental pieces in equal measure. The Public continues the work of its visionary founder, Joe Papp, by acting as an advocate for the theater as an essential cultural force, and leading and framing dialogue on some of the most important issues of our day. Creating theater for one of the largest and most diverse audience bases in New York City for nearly 60 years, today the Company engages audiences in a variety of venues—including its landmark downtown home at Astor Place, which houses five theaters and Joe’s Pub; the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, home to its beloved, free Shakespeare in the Park; and the Mobile Unit, which tours Shakespearean productions for underserved audiences throughout New York City’s five boroughs.

The Public’s wide range of programming includes free Shakespeare in the Park, the bedrock of the Company’s dedication to making theater accessible to all; Public Works, a new initiative that is designed to cultivate new connections and new models of engagement with artists, audiences, and the community each; new and experimental stagings at The Public at Astor Place, including Public Lab and Public Studio; and a range of artist and audience development initiatives including its Public Forum series, which brings together theater artists and professionals from a variety of disciplines for discussions that shed light on social issues of the day. The Public also serves as a home for other New York City cultural programs that include The Shakespeare Society, The PEN World Voice Festival, and City Center’s Fall For Dance. The Public Theater is located on property owned by the City of New York and receives annual support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affair. In October 2012 the landmark building at Astor Place was revitalized to physically manifest the Company’s core mission of sparking new dialogues and increasing accessibility for artists and audiences, by dramatically opening up the building to the street and community, and transforming the lobby into a public piazza for artists, students, and audiences. Key elements of the revitalization included an expanded and refurbished lobby and the addition of a mezzanine level with a new restaurant lounge, The Library, designed by the Rockwell Group. The LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust provides leadership support for The Public Theater’s year-round activities. www.publictheater.org