



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ARIZONA THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS ONLINE DIGITAL READING OF NEW WORK, *COVENANT*, BASED ON LEGEND OF BLUES GREAT ROBERT JOHNSON

Legend has it that landmark blues guitarist, singer and songwriter Robert Johnson, who played mostly on street corners and juke joints with little commercial success or public recognition in his short life (1911-1938), traded his soul to the devil in exchange for his incredible technique that influenced everyone from Muddy Waters to The Rolling Stones.

That myth is the foundation for York Walker's new work, ***Covenant***, which will be presented as a work in progress in an online digital play reading by Arizona Theatre Company.

Covenant explores the power of belief and tests the thin veil between rumor and truth when a guitar player returns to his small town two years after his sudden disappearance as a blues star, setting in motion rumors that he made that deal with the devil.

Directed by Tamilla Woodward, Erron Crawford will take on the role of Johnny "Honeycomb" James and will be joined in the production by Kishia Nixon (Ruthie), Sydney Banks (Violet), Jessica Johnson (Avery) and Kimberly Fairbanks (Mama). Ido Levran is the Technical Director, Mathew DeVore is the Sound Designer. Stage directions will be provided by Miguel Jackson and Glenn Bruner is the Stage Manager.

Covenant will be accessible on ATC's website (www.arizonatheatre.org) as well as on Facebook, YouTube and Vimeo from 5 p.m., Oct. 28 to 5 p.m., Nov. 1. There is no charge to view the play, but donations to Arizona Theatre Company are encouraged and will be greatly appreciated.

Covenant is the next in a series of virtual performances offered by Arizona Theatre Company until it is safe to return to live performances in 2021.

“I have been a York Walker fan for over a decade and it’s a real honor to be able to invite him to ATC in a moment where he’s been so celebrated - having just won the inaugural Colman Domingo Award,” said ATC Artistic Director Sean Daniels. “Also, it’s important for our audience to see what plays look like at the beginning - every great August Wilson, Eugene O’Neill, Shakespeare etc. was once an early draft, learning from each reading. I have no doubt York has a bright future ahead of him, and we will always be proud to say we knew him when!”

Community events surrounding the virtual performance include:

- **Creatives in Conversation Campfire**, Saturday, Oct. 31, 3 p.m., Facebook LIVE: Warmup with hosts Chanel Bragg and Will Rogers as they join members of the cast and creative team of **Covenant** to share stories of horror, the spirit world and the digital rehearsal room. Don't miss this bone-chilling conversation just in time for Halloween.
- **Cohort Play Reading Club**, Monday, November 2, 4pm: Through an expanded relationship with United Colours of Arizona Theatre, Cohorts are invited to this private reading and discussion of York Walker's **Summer of '63**. These programs are made available to members of our free community groups, ATCteens and ATC Cohort Club. Visit arizonatheatre.org to join.
- **The Horror of Playwriting**: An ATCteen Workshop, Friday, October 30, 3pm. York Walker hosts this special workshop on writing for the horror genre.

For more information about these events and upcoming digital offerings at www.arizonatheatre.com/covenant.

Covenant will be followed by **The Realness** by Idris Goodwin, directed by Megan Sandberg-Zakian – ATC Premiere November 2020.

ATC has announced that it will bring live theatre back to the Temple of Music & Art in Tucson in January and the Herberger Theater Center in Phoenix in February – albeit to limited audiences – with an entertaining and engaging six-show Mainstage Season chosen by Daniels.

In addition to live theatre, ATC will release an exclusive limited-time broadcast of each performance for ticket holders uncomfortable returning to the theatre to view at home. Exclusive show broadcasts will be shot on opening night with three cameras and will be produced for at-home viewing.

Audiences for live performances will be limited to approximately 25 percent of theatre capacity, and shows will be held under strict Arizona Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-protection guidelines.

The season opens with ATC Artistic Director Daniels directing the delightful award-winning musical, ***My 80-Year-Old Boyfriend***, created by Charissa Bertels, Christian Duhamel and Edward Bell, Jan. 23-Feb. 13 in Tucson and Feb. 18-March 7 in Phoenix.

It will be followed by a new musical about Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sandra Day O'Connor, the first two women to serve on the United States Supreme Court, ***Justice A Musical***, written by Lauren Gunderson, with lyrics by Kait Kerrigan and music by Brian Lowdermilk, March 13 to April 3 in Tucson and April 8-25 in Phoenix; ***Nina Simone: Four Women***, written by Christina Ham, directed by Tiffany Nichole Greene, April 24-May 15 in Tucson, May 20-June 6 in Phoenix; ***Women in Jeopardy!***, Wendy MacLeod's riotous comedy, directed by Daniels, Tucson June 5-26 and in Phoenix July 1-8; ***how to make an American Son***, by ATC Artistic Associate christopher oscar peña, directed by Kimberly Senior, a co-production with Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, Tucson July 17-August 7 and in Phoenix Aug. 12-29; and ***The Legend of Georgia McBride***, written by Matthew Lopez and directed by Meredith McDonough, Tucson Sept. 25-Oct. 16 and in Phoenix Oct. 21-Nov. 7.

BIOS

York Walker (Playwright) is an award-winning writer based in Harlem, New York. He is the inaugural recipient of the Vineyard Theatre's Colman Domingo Award. His work includes ***The Séance*** (Winner of the John Singleton Short Film Competition, 48 Hours... in Harlem), ***Covenant*** (Fire This Time Festival, Access Theatre's 4 Flights Up Festival), ***White Shoes*** (Fire This Time Festival), ***Summer Of '63*** (The Actors Company Theatre's New TACTics Festival, Actor's Theatre of Louisville's Apprentice Reading Series) and ***Of Dreams To Come*** (American Conservatory Theatre's New Work Series). York received his MFA in Acting from the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco.

Tamilla Woodard (Director) is the Co-Artistic Director of Working Theater. This season her work includes *American Dreams*, By Leila Buck, *Where We Stand* by Donnetta Lavinia Grays for WP Theater and Baltimore Center Stage, Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* at American Conservatory Theater and direction and co-conception of *Warriors Don't Cry*, a Co-production of The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts and TheaterWorksUSA. Recently named one of 50 Women To Watch on Broadway, Tamilla is a graduate of Yale School of Drama where she also teaches.

Kishia Nixon (Ruthie) iPrevious credits include: Sweet Miss in *La Ronde with Die Cast*; Cath McGrath in *SPIES: Even More Spying!* Philadelphia Fring; Emily in *Aggy the Adventurer* with Act II Play house; Sofja in *Three Sisters Two* and Catherine in *The Children's Hour* with Egopo Classic Theater. Digital credits include: Narrator in *In Defense of Ourselves* with Philly women's theater festival and Sammy in *Sixteen* with Jouska Playworks. Thanks to Arizona Theater Company and York Walker. Black lives matter.

Sydney Banks (Violet) is a 22 year old African American female, born and raised in Baltimore, MD. She is a performer, writer and business owner. She is a young independent, truthful and humble visualizer and artist. She has worked on musicals and plays in the Philadelphia area

(Vertical Hour Lantern Theater Company; *Romeo & Juliet The Wilma Theater*; *Ouija On the Rocks*; *Wild Party UArts*) and performed overseas in the UK as well. While not only creating work that is real to the environment and society, she is attracted to work that intertwines movement and body to words and speech. She is inspired by diversity. She is passionate about creating works of art not only for POC, but planting their reality in characters and stories told by the truth and not by the perception of what others believe the truth is.

Jessica Johnson (Avery) is a Philadelphia based performing and teaching artist. She began her artistic career in Philadelphia as a Dorothy Haas Acting Apprentice at the Walnut Street Theatre. Over the past two years, Ms. Johnson has performed in over 25 readings, workshops and full-length productions; performing regionally with the Walnut Street Theatre, Arden Theatre Company, New Paradise Laboratories, Quintessence Theatre Company, Inis Nua Theatre, Theatre Exile, 1812 Theatre Productions, PlayPenn, Interact Theatre Group, Pig Iron Theatre Company, Anti- Gravity Theatre Collective, Gretna Theatre and Theatre Horizon. Ms. Johnson received her B.A. in Theatre and Dance from James Madison University, where she was awarded a full academic scholarship through the Centennial Scholars Program. There she excelled as an acting concentration and was recognized for her academic and artistic contributions as a *Spotlight on Madison* and selected as the outstanding graduate of 2012. Following graduation, Ms. Johnson performed in the Festival de Avignon, before starting her professional career in Philadelphia. Currently, when Ms. Johnson isn't onstage, she serves as a volunteer for the Barrymore Oversight Committee. This year Ms. Johnson was awarded an Independence Foundation Fellowship and the Jilline Ringle Residency to develop independent work. She received her first Barrymore Award for Outstanding Lead Performer in a Musical for her role as Celie in *The Color Purple*.

Kimberly S. Fairbanks (Mama) is an actor and voice-over artist. Credits include: International: *I Will Speak for Myself* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe), Off-Broadway: *I Will Speak for Myself* (59E59 Theater), *The Mecca Tales* (Sheen Center), Regional: *Dance Nation* (The Wilma Theater), *Sweat* (Philadelphia Theatre Company); *Sanctions* (World Premiere/Delaware Theatre Company), *I Will Speak for Myself* (Eugene O'Neill Foundation), *Sing the Body Electric* (Theatre Exile), *Human Rites* (InterAct Theatre), *Passing Strange* (The Wilma Theater). Film/Television: *Glass*, *The Upside*, *FBI: Most Wanted*, *Instinct*, *Madam Secretary*, *The Looming Tower*, *Delco Proper*, *House of Cards*, and *The Family*.

Erron Crawford (Johnny "Honeycomb" James) an Atlanta native and recent LA transplant holds an M.F.A. from Yale School of Drama where his credits include *Hamlet*, as the title character, Jeremy O. Harris' original production of *Slave Play*, and Tori Sampson's *If Pretty Hurts Ugly Must Be a Muhfucka*. At the Yale Repertory Theatre: *Father Comes Home From the Wars* and the critically acclaimed Afro-futurist production of *Twelfth Night*; *In the Red and Brown Water* (Yale Cabaret); *Antony+Cleopatra* (Yale Summer Cabaret); *The Wiz*, *Seven Guitars*, *Once on This Island* (Carnegie Mellon); *Scheherazade* (FringeNYC), among others. Erron also holds a B.F.A. in musical theater from Carnegie Mellon.

COVENANT FACT SHEET

Covenant

Written by York Walker

Directed by Tamilla Woodard

Viewing Dates

Oct. 28-Nov. 1

Viewing Options

ATC website (www.arizonatheatre.org), YouTube channel, Facebook and Vimeo.

CREATIVE TEAM

Technical Director: Ido Levran

Sound Design: Mathew DeVore

Stage Directions: Miguel Jackson

Stage Manager: Glenn Bruner

Contact:

Steve Carr, The Kur Carr Group, Inc., (602) 317-3040

About Arizona Theatre Company:

Under new leadership and now celebrating its 54th Season, Arizona Theatre Company is truly “The State Theatre,” with the largest subscriber base of any performing arts organization in Arizona. More than 130,000 people each year attend performances at the historic Temple of Music and Art in Tucson and the elegant Herberger Theater Center in downtown Phoenix.

Each season of high-quality productions reflects the rich variety of world theatre – from classic to contemporary plays, from musicals to new works – and audiences enjoy the rich emotional experience and joy that can only be captured through live theatre. ATC is the preeminent professional theatre in the state of Arizona. Under the direction of Artistic Director Sean Daniels and Managing Director Geri Wright, ATC operates in two cities – unlike any other League of Resident Theaters (LORT) company in the country.

ATC shares the passion of the theatre through a wide array of outreach programs, educational opportunities, access initiatives and community events. With more than 800 Education & Engagement activities through schools and summer programs, ATC focuses on teaching Arizona’s youth about the creative power of dramatic literature and how it can enrich their own lives in multiple ways

ATC reaches far beyond the metropolitan areas of Tucson and Phoenix, enriching the theatre learning experience nationally for current and future audiences.