

THE PUBLIC THEATER
ANNOUNCES
INITIAL CASTING FOR
NEW YORK PREMIERE OF
TARELL ALVIN McCRANEY'S
HEAD OF PASSES

Directed by Tina Landau
Tony Award Winner Phylicia Rashad To Play Shelah

November 11, 2015 – The Public Theater (Artistic Director, Oskar Eustis; Executive Director, Patrick Willingham) announced initial casting today for the New York premiere of *HEAD OF PASSES*, written by **Tarell Alvin McCraney** and directed by **Tina Landau**. **Phylicia Rashad** returns to The Public to play “Shelah” in this deeply moving new drama about family, acceptance, and the power of faith. Rashad last appeared at The Public in *The Story* by Tracey Scott Wilson in 2003. *HEAD OF PASSES* begins previews on Tuesday, March 15 in the Newman Theater with an official press opening on Monday, March 28.

In addition to Rashad, other casting for the nine-person play includes **Alana Arenas** (*Cookie*), **Francois Battiste** (*Aubrey*), **Kyle Beltran** (*Crier*), and **J. Bernard Calloway** (*Spencer*).

Single tickets for all spring shows, including *Head of Passes*, *Southern Comfort*, *Hungry*, *Dry Powder*, *The Total Bent* and the Mobile Shakespeare Unit's *Romeo & Juliet* will be available beginning in early December by calling **(212) 967-7555**, www.publictheater.org, or in person at the Taub Box Office at The Public Theater at 425 Lafayette Street. The Library at The Public is open nightly for food and drinks, beginning at 5:00 p.m., and Joe's Pub at The Public continues to offer some of the best music in the city.

Tarell Alvin McCraney, MacArthur Award-winning playwright of the acclaimed *Brother/Sister Plays*, has written a poetic and contemporary parable inspired by the Book of Job. At the mouth of the Mississippi River, Shelah's family and friends have come to celebrate her birthday and save her from a leaking roof but unexpected events turn the reunion into the ultimate test of faith and love. As her world seems to collapse around her, Shelah must fight to survive the rising flood of life's greatest challenges. *HEAD OF PASSES* is a co-production with Berkeley Repertory Theatre.

HEAD OF PASSES features scenic design by G.W. Mercier, costume design by Toni-Leslie James, lighting design by Jeff Croiter, sound design by Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen, and hair and wig design by Robert-Charles Vallance.

TARELL ALVIN McCRANEY (*Playwright*) was last seen at The Public with his edit of *Antony and Cleopatra*, a co-production with The Public, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and Miami's GableStage; *The Brother/Sister Plays*, and *The Brothers Size* at the Under the Radar Festival. His additional credits include *Head of Passes* (Steppenwolf); *Choir Boy* (Royal Court/Manhattan Theatre Club); and *Wig Out!* (Sundance Theatre Lab/Vineyard Theatre/Royal Court). McCraney was the International Writer in Residence for the Royal Shakespeare Company from 2009 to 2011 where he remains an associate artist. He is an ensemble member at Steppenwolf Theatre Company, in Chicago and a founding member of Teo Castellanos/D-Projects in Miami. In 2013, McCraney received the prestigious MacArthur "Genius" Grant.

He also is the recipient of the Doris Duke Artist Award, Whiting Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, London's Evening Standard Award for Most Promising Playwright, the inaugural *New York Times* Outstanding Playwright Award, the inaugural Paula Vogel Playwriting Award, and the inaugural Windham Campbell Award from Yale University.

TINA LANDAU (*Director*) collaborates frequently with McCraney, having directed his *In the Red Brown Water* (The Public, Alliance, and McCarter theaters), *Wig Out* (Vineyard Theatre), *The Brother/Sister Plays* (Steppenwolf), and *Head of Passes* (Steppenwolf, Berkeley Rep.) She is an ensemble member at Steppenwolf in Chicago where she's directed 18 productions including *The Wheel*, *The Tempest*, *The Time of Your Life*, *Cherry Orchard*, *Ballad of Little Jo*, *Berlin Circle*, and her own play *Space* (also The Public). Landau's other New York directing credits include Chuck Mee's *Big Love* and *Iphigenia 2.0*, and Bill Irwin/David Shiner's *Old Hats* (all Signature Theatre), Paula Vogel's *A Civil War Christmas* (New York Theatre Workshop), *Dream True* with Ricky Ian Gordon (for which she also wrote book and lyrics; Vineyard Theatre), and *Floyd Collins* with Adam Guettel (for which she also wrote Book and Additional Lyrics; Playwrights Horizons). On Broadway, Landau's directed the revival of *Bells Are Ringing* and Tracy Letts' *Superior Donuts*, and will direct the upcoming *The SpongeBob Musical*. She teaches regularly and has co-authored, with Anne Bogart, *The Viewpoints Book*.

ALANA ARENAS (*Cookie*) joined the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble in 2007 and created the role of Pecola Breedlove for its Young Adults production of *The Bluest Eye*, which also played at the New Victory Off-Broadway. Her credits include *Marie Antoinette*, *Tribes*, *Belleville*, *Head of Passes*, *Good People*, *Three Sisters*, *The March*, *Man in Love*, *Middletown*, *The Hot L Baltimore*, *The Etiquette of Vigilance*, *The Brother/Sister Plays*; *The Tempest*, *The Crucible*, *Spare Change*, *The Sparrow Project* (Steppenwolf); *Disgraced* (ATC); *The Arabian Nights* (Lookingglass, Berkeley Rep, Kansas City Rep); *Black Diamond* (Lookingglass); *Eyes* (eta Creative Arts); SOST (MPAACT); *WVON* (Black Ensemble Theater); *Hecuba*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater); and *Eclipsed* (Northlight Theatre). Television and film credits include *Crisis*, *Boss*, *The Beast*, *Kabuku Rides*, and *Lioness of Lisabi*.

FRANCOIS BATTISTE (*Aubrey*) has been seen at The Public in *Detroit '67*; *The Good Negro*, for which he received an OBIE Award and Lortel Award nomination; and *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Winter's Tale* at the Delacorte Theater. He has been seen on Broadway in *Bronx Bombers* at Circle in the Square; *Prelude to a Kiss* at Roundabout; and *Magic/Bird* at the Longacre. His additional Off-Broadway credits include *Broke-ology* at Lincoln Center, *10 Things to do Before I Die* at Second Stage, and *Bronx Bombers* at Primary Stages. He has worked regionally at Williamstown, Sundance, Chicago Shakespeare, The Goodman, Victory Gardens, Lookingglass, and Dallas Theatre Center. His film and television credits include *Men in Black III*, *You Bury Your Own*, *Delivering the Goods*, *One Week*, HBO's "The Normal Heart," ABC's "The Family," "Person of Interest," "The Good Wife," and "Are We There Yet?"

KYLE BELTRAN (*Crier*) has previously been seen at The Public in *The Fortress of Solitude*. His Broadway credits include *In the Heights*; and his additional Off-Broadway credits include *The Flick* at Barrow Street, *Gloria* at the Vineyard, *Choir Boy* at MTC, and *10 Things To Do Before I Die* at 2ST. He has performed in the national tour of *In the Heights* and has been seen regionally in *The Fortress of Solitude* at Dallas Theater Center, *Head of Passes* at Steppenwolf, *Good Goods* at Yale Rep, *Kingdom* at Old Globe, and *Aida* at WVPT. His television credits include "The Big C" and "Unforgettable." He can be seen in the upcoming film *Equity*.

J. BERNARD CALLOWAY (*Spencer*) is returning to The Public after appearing as "Henry Evans" in *The Good Negro*. He is currently appearing as the first African-American to play the Grinch in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* at The Old Globe Theater. His Broadway credits include "Delray" in the 2010 Tony Award-winning Best Musical *Memphis*, and "Ralph Abernathy" in the 2014 Tony Award-winning Best Play *All The Way*. His film and televisions credits include the upcoming series in January 2016 "The Breaks" on VH1; "Blue Bloods"; "Elementary"; and "Law and Order: SVU."

PHYLICIA RASHAD (*Shelah*) was last seen at The Public in *The Story* by Tracey Scott Wilson in 2003, as well as in *Helen* in 2002, and *Everybody's Rudy* in 1999. She is a versatile performer who became a household name when she portrayed "Claire Huxtable" on "The Cosby Show," a character whose appeal has earned numerous honors and awards for over two decades. While television was a catalyst in the rise of Rashad's career, she has also been a force on the stage, appearing both on and off-Broadway, often in projects that showcase her musical talent such as *Jelly's Last Jam*, *Into The Woods*, *Dreamgirls*, and *The Wiz*. As a dramatic actress, Rashad has appeared on Broadway in *August Osage County*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (also West End), *Gem Of The Ocean* (Tony nomination), *A Raisin in the Sun* (Drama Desk and Tony Awards) and *Cymbeline*. She appeared in Tyler Perry's *Good Deeds*, and starred in Perry's highly acclaimed film version of Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*. She made her directorial debut at the Seattle Repertory Theater with August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* and has directed works at The Ebony Repertory, Kirk Douglas Theatre, Westport County Playhouse, Mark Taper, Longwharf Theatre, and the McCarter Theatre. Rashad has received numerous honorary doctorate degrees and awards for excellence both in theater and television.

ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER:

The Public Theater, under the leadership of Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, is the only theater in New York that produces Shakespeare, the classics, musicals, contemporary and experimental pieces in equal measure. Celebrating his 10th anniversary season at The Public, Eustis has created new community-based initiatives designed to engage audiences like Public Lab, Public Studio, Public Forum, Public Works, and a remount of the Mobile Shakespeare Unit. 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 free Shakespeare in the Park; and the Mobile Shakespeare 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, an expanding initiative that is designed to cultivate new connections and new models of engagement with artists, audiences and the community each year; and audience and artist development initiatives that range from Emerging Writers Group and to the Public Forum series. The Public is located on property owned by the City of New York and receives annual support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; and in October 2012 the landmark building downtown 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. The Public is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning *Fun Home* and Lin-Manuel Miranda's acclaimed American musical *Hamilton*. The Public has received 47 Tony Awards, 167 Obie Awards, 52 Drama Desk Awards, 48 Lortel Awards, 31 Outer Critics Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics Awards, and four Pulitzer Prizes. www.publictheater.org

The LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust provides leadership support for The Public Theater's year-round activities; Bank of America, Proud Season Sponsor of Shakespeare in the Park; The Harold & Mimi Steinberg New Play Development Fund at The Public Theater Supports the Creation and Development of New Plays; The Philip and Janice Levin Foundation - Lead Supporter of The Public's Access and Engagement Programming; The Time Warner Foundation, Founding Sponsor of The Emerging Writers Group; Delta Air Lines, Official Airline of The Public Theater; *New York Magazine* is the official print sponsor of The Public Theater's 2015-2016 downtown season; Public support is provided by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency; and the National Endowment for the Arts, an independent federal agency.

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TICKET INFORMATION

HEAD OF PASSES will begin previews in The Public's Newman Theater on Tuesday, March 15, with an official press opening on Monday, March 28.

Single tickets, starting at \$60 will be available mid-December by calling **(212) 967-7555**, www.publictheater.org, or in person at the Taub Box Office at The Public Theater at 425 Lafayette Street.

The performance schedule is Tuesdays through Fridays at 7:30 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays at 1:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. (*There is no performance on Saturday, March 19 at 1:30 p.m.; Tuesday, March 29 at 7:30 p.m.; and Sunday, April 17 at 7:30 p.m.*)

The Library at The Public is open nightly for food and drinks, beginning at 5:00 p.m., and Joe's Pub at The Public continues to offer some of the best music in the city. For more information, visit www.publictheater.org.