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#RoyaleLTC

Lantern Theater Company Presents Philadelphia Premiere of **THE ROYALE** by Marco Ramirez, Directed by Zuhairah McGill Onstage November 10 – December 11, 2022

PHILADELPHIA (October 27, 2022) – **Lantern Theater Company** continues its 2022/23 season with the Philadelphia premiere of *The Royale* by award-winning American playwright **Marco Ramirez**. Philadelphia theater artist **Zuhairah McGill** makes her Lantern directorial debut, leading an ensemble cast of Philadelphia actors that includes **Phillip Brown, Morgan Charéce Hall, Gregory Isaac, Brian Anthony Wilson, and Kahlil A. Wyatt**. *The Royale* runs **Thursday, November 10 through Sunday, December 11, 2022**, at St. Stephen's Theater, the Lantern's resident venue; a complete schedule of performances and audience enrichment events is included in the fact sheet below. Theater critics and members of the press are invited to request press tickets for **opening night on Wednesday, November 16 at 7 p.m.** by contacting Anne Shuff at ashuff@lanterntheater.org. To ensure a safe and comfortable theater experience, everyone other than the actors on stage must wear **properly fitted masks** while attending *The Royale*.

Hailed as “riveting,” “original and graceful,” and “gripping” by *Variety*, *The New York Times*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, respectively, *The Royale* takes inspiration from the life of Jack Johnson, the first African American heavyweight world boxing champion. Marco Ramirez's drama is filled with the rhythms of the ring and of the people fighting for freedom, dignity, and success in a fascinating and important chapter in our national story.

Set in the early 1900s, boxer Jay “The Sport” Jackson is the Negro Heavyweight Champion in a segregated world. “So good at the sport that they call him ‘The Sport,’” Jackson dreams of becoming the unquestioned heavyweight champion of the world. His fight promoter, Max, is able to organize “the fight of the century” between Jay and Bixby, the reigning white heavyweight champion – on the condition that Jay allows Bixby to collect 90 percent of the purse, win or lose. But just before the match, Jay's sister Nina visits him to express her

fear of the dangers that their community will face if he wins: “I think you’re so caught up in playing David to Goliath, in being the one fish swimming upstream, I think you up and forgot about the rest of us, the ones ain’t as strong as you.” Jay is forced to confront his desire to break barriers in the ring – and the external consequences that he and his community will surely face if he does. *The Royale*’s inventive staging resonantly connects the personal and political while exploring powerful tensions between opportunity and inequality.

“Marco Ramirez has created a powerful and moving story of personal triumph that turns the country on its head,” said Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon**. “Loosely based on the story of the great Jack Johnson, *The Royale* takes us back to a pivotal moment in the struggle of Black Americans for respect and the full rights of citizenship.”

“This play means so much to me as a director because I am a fighter just like Jack Johnson was,” said **Zuhairah McGill**, who directs the Lantern’s production. “But more than that it’s not just me, but all African Americans who are still in the ring fighting. At the height of the Jim Crow Era, this man was able to rise above it all, they say. But I say: We are in The New Jim Crow. Jack Johnson insisted on being free, and in 2022 *we* are still insisting.”

“Even beyond being a boxer, Johnson is remembered for being a guy who pushed boundaries,” **Marco Ramirez** said of his play. “His true legacy isn’t just an athletic one, it’s cultural. It was shocking, how relevant his persona was to the 21st century. Many of the people in this country still struggle when cultural icons make declarations that seem ‘too political’ for the personas they’ve created as artists or athletes. Just consider the responses to Beyoncé’s overtly political halftime performance at the 2016 Superbowl... They love her music when it’s all fun and games. They don’t when she asks them to confront systematic racism. It’s weirdly the same conversation people had around Jack Johnson... There are so many boxer stories about whether the boxer can win the fight. In the world of theater, it is more of a moral and ethical question about whether he *should* win the fight.” Originally produced by Center Theatre Group in 2013 and Lincoln Center Theater in 2016, *The Royale* went on to win an Outer Critics Circle’s John Gassner Playwriting Award and multiple Drama Desk Award nominations.

Lantern Theater Company will delve deeper into the themes of *The Royale* on its **Lantern Searchlight blog**, available online at lanterntheater.org/searchlight. Articles will be published throughout the production’s run, exploring the play’s historical context, the history of Jack Johnson and the sport of boxing, behind the scenes interviews with the artists, and more.

Tickets for *The Royale* are \$25 – \$42 and are available online at www.lanterntheater.org or by calling the Lantern Box Office at **(215) 829-0395**. Discounts are available for students, seniors 65 and up, U.S. military

personnel, and groups of 10 or more. Performances of *The Royale* will take place at **St. Stephen's Theater**, located at 923 Ludlow Street in Center City Philadelphia. During the 2022/23 season, the Lantern will announce updated health and safety guidelines 30 days prior to the start of each production. For *The Royale*, everyone other than the actors on stage must wear **properly fitted masks** at all times in all parts of the Lantern performance venue, including the lobby, performance space, restrooms, and stairwells. More detailed information is available at lanterntheater.org/health-and-safety.

About the Artists

Marco Ramirez is an award-winning American playwright and television writer/producer. His plays have been produced at Lincoln Center Theater, The Kennedy Center, The Old Globe, Center Theatre Group, The Juilliard School, London's Bush Theatre, and Actors Theatre of Louisville's Humana Festival of New American Plays, where he has twice received the Heideman Award. Other honors include the Outer Critics Circle's John Gassner Playwriting Award for *The Royale*, Juilliard's Lila Acheson Wallace Playwriting Fellowship, Lincoln Center's Le Comte du Nouy Award, Theatre Communication Group's Edgerton Foundation New Play Award, and Helen Hayes and Drama Desk nominations. As a WGA and Emmy-nominated television writer, he has written for numerous hit shows including FX's *Sons of Anarchy*, AMC's *Fear the Walking Dead*, and Netflix's *Orange Is the New Black*, *Daredevil*, and *The Defenders*. Ramirez trained at New York University and The Juilliard School.

Philadelphia-based director, actress, and producer **Zuhairah McGill** makes her Lantern directorial debut with *The Royale*. McGill is founder and producing artistic director of First World Theatre Ensemble, where she has directed productions of *For Colored Girls*, *The Cooling Board*, *Long Time Since Yesterday*, *Survival Strategies: A Tale of Faith*, *Usher's*, and *Eubie*. Other theater credits include acting and directing work with Arden Theatre Company, Quintessence Theatre Group, Hedgerow Theatre, Westside Theatre, ATA Theatre, Sante Fe Playhouse, National Black Theatre, Pulse Ensemble Theatre, Steel River Playhouse, and the 2022 National Black Theatre Festival, where she was invited to perform her one-woman show, *Sojourner*. Part of the Barrymore Award-winning ensemble in Arden Theatre Company's *Gem of the Ocean*, McGill has also received the Black Arts for Social Change Award, DC Excellence in Black Theatre Award, and Most Distinguished Director Award.

The ensemble cast of *The Royale* includes **Phillip Brown** as Jay "The Sport" Jackson (Lantern debut; theater credits include Quintessence Theatre Group, Walnut Street Theatre, actor/writer/coach for several Disney television shows, director of theater for The Shipley School in Bryn Mawr); **Morgan Charéce Hall** as Jay's big sister, Nina (*Travesties* and *A Man for All Seasons* at the Lantern); Gregory Isaac as Jay's fight promoter, Max (*Travesties*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *The Gospel According to Thomas Jefferson*, *Charles Dickens & Count Leo Tolstoy: Discord*, many others); **Brian Anthony Wilson** as Jay's longtime trainer, Wynton (*The Resistible Rise*

of *Arturo Ui*); and **Kahlil A. Wyatt** as Fish, an up-and-coming boxer who becomes Jay's sparring partner (Lantern debut).

The creative team includes a talented group of theater artists making their Lantern debuts: scenic and lighting designer **Will Lowry**, costume designer **Ali Turns**, and sound designer **Jairous L. Parker**. The team also includes **Simon "One Punch" Carr** as boxing/movement consultant, **Dr. Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon** as production dramaturgy consultant, stage manager **Rebecca Smith**, and assistant director **Zaria Leonard-White**.

About Lantern Theater Company

Founded in 1994 and continuing its 29th season with *The Royale* by Marco Ramirez, Lantern Theater Company's mission is to produce plays that investigate and illuminate what is essential in the human spirit and the spirit of the times. The Lantern serves the Greater Philadelphia region with award-winning productions and education programming, notably partnering with middle schools and high schools in the Philadelphia School District to provide in-classroom residencies in support of curricular learning. The Lantern became a national leader in streaming theater during the Covid-19 health crisis, producing ten fully designed plays that were created and filmed in the company's resident home at St. Stephen's Theater, garnering coverage in national media including *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and reaching more than 30,000 patrons in 15 countries and all 50 states.

Following *The Royale*, the Lantern's 2022/23 season will continue with its original production of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol* by Anthony Lawton in collaboration with Christopher Colucci and Thom Weaver (**Press Opening: Sunday, December 4, 2022, at 2 p.m.**); the Philadelphia premiere of *The Lifespan of a Fact* by Jeremy Kareken, David Murrell, and Gordon Farrell, directed by Matt Pfeiffer (**Press Opening: Wednesday, February 8, 2023, at 7 p.m.**); and *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare, directed by Charles McMahan (**Press Opening: Wednesday, May 24, 2023, at 7 p.m.**). More information is available online at www.lanterntheater.org.

Lantern Theater Company – 2022/23 Season
FACT SHEET
The Royale

WRITTEN BY:

Marco Ramirez

DIRECTED AND CHOREOGRAPHED BY:

Zuhairah McGill

CAST:

Phillip Brown as Jay

Morgan Charéce Hall as Nina

Gregory Isaac as Max

Brian Anthony Wilson as Wynton

Kahlil A. Wyatt as Fish

CREATIVE TEAM:

Will Lowry, Scenic & Lighting Designer

Ali Turns, Costume Designer

Jairous L. Parker, Sound Designer

Simon “One Punch” Carr, Boxing/Movement Consultant

Dr. Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon, Production Dramaturgy Consultant

Rebecca Smith, Stage Manager

Zaria Leonard-White, Assistant Director

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TICKET INFORMATION:

Online: www.lanterntheater.org

By Phone: (215) 829-0395

TICKET PRICING:

\$25 – \$42

PERFORMANCES:

Thursday, November 10 – Sunday, December 11, 2022

PREVIEWS:

Thursday, November 10 at 7 p.m.

Friday, November 11 at 8 p.m.

Saturday, November 12 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, November 13 at 2 p.m.

Tuesday, November 15 at 6:30 p.m.

OPENING NIGHT:

Wednesday, November 16 at 7 p.m.

REGULAR RUN:

Wednesday at 2 p.m. on November 23 [AIC], November 30 [AIC], and December 7

Wednesday at 7 p.m. on November 23, November 30, and December 7
Thursday at 7 p.m. on November 17, December 1, and December 8 (no performance November 24)
Friday at 8 p.m. on November 18, November 25, and December 2 (no performance December 9)
Saturday at 2 p.m. on November 19, November 26, December 3, and December 10
Saturday at 8 p.m. on November 19, November 26, December 3, and December 10
Sunday at 2 p.m. on November 20 [AIC], November 27 [AIC], December 4, and December 11

CLOSING PERFORMANCE:

Sunday, December 11 at 2 p.m.

ARTISTS IN CONVERSATION [AIC]

Moderated post-show discussions with the cast immediately follow 2 p.m. performances on Sunday, November 20; Wednesday, November 23; Sunday, November 27; and Wednesday, November 30. Lantern resident dramaturg Meghan Winch will lead the discussions.

PLAY SYNOPSIS:

Set in the early 1900s, *The Royale* takes inspiration from the life of Jack Johnson, the first African American heavyweight world boxing champion. Ramirez's riveting drama is filled with the rhythms of the ring and of the people fighting for freedom, dignity, and success in a fascinating and important chapter in our national story.

PERFORMANCE VENUE:

St. Stephen's Theater at 923 Ludlow Street in Center City Philadelphia

COVID-19 HEALTH & SAFETY PROTOCOLS:

To ensure the continued safety of our artists, staff, and patrons, everyone other than the actors on stage must wear properly fitted masks at all times in all parts of the Lantern's venue. More detailed information is available at lanterntheater.org/health-and-safety.