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#CrumbsLTC

Lantern Theater Company Continues 30th Anniversary Season with *CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY* by Lynn Nottage, Directed by Bianca LaVerne Jones, November 9 – December 10, 2023

PHILADELPHIA (November 3, 2023) – **Lantern Theater Company** is thrilled to continue its **30th anniversary season** with two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner **Lynn Nottage**'s dramatic gem, *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*. Director **Bianca LaVerne Jones** makes her Lantern Theater Company debut, leading a cast of Philadelphia theater artists that includes **Monet Debose, Walter DeShields, Morgan Charéce Hall, Hillary Parker, and Brett Ashley Robinson**. *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* runs **Thursday, November 9 through Sunday, December 10, 2023**, 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 planning coverage are invited to request press tickets for **opening weekend performances – Thursday, November 16 through Sunday, November 19** – by contacting Anne Shuff at ashuff@lanterntheater.org.

Following the Lantern's acclaimed 2022 production of *Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine*, the company returns to the extraordinary and widely varied work of Lynn Nottage with *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*, a warmly lyrical memory play about growing up through grief and in tumultuous times. Through the story of the Crump family, Nottage explores storytelling and a family working out how to move on from loss, set amidst the racial tensions of 1950s Brooklyn.

Crumbs from the Table of Joy is set in the aftermath of a devastating loss. After the death of his beloved wife, Godfrey Crump moves his two teenage daughters Ernestine and Ermina from Florida to 1950s Brooklyn. He is hoping to be closer to the mission of Father Divine, seeking spiritual fulfillment that will help him and his

daughters through their grief. Shortly after their arrival, the late woman's sister Lily arrives from Harlem, offering the girls a different model of independence, empowerment, and fulfillment that clashes with their father's strict household. When Godfrey suddenly remarries and brings home new wife Gerte, a recent German immigrant, tensions deepen as the girls seek to make their own lives and tell their own stories. Ernestine is our guide through the play, weaving the memories of this formative period in her life into an imaginative, poetic, and charming narrative about finding hope and building a self in a time of personal and political upheaval.

“Is there a better living American playwright than **Lynn Nottage**?” Terry Teachout asked in a 2021 *Wall Street Journal* review. For many, the answer is simple: there is not. Nottage is one of today's most prolific, most empathetic, and most surprising writers. Her illustrious career spans comedy, drama, and plays that live in between the two, and her work is always deeply grounded in place and circumstance. She is the first – and remains the only – woman to have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice. Her wide-ranging curiosity leads her to write on an astonishing variety of subjects and themes, and her extraordinary talent enables her to mold the structure, language, and tone as a particular story demands. Nottage writes smart, incisive investigations into human nature, and her stories and the characters peopling them are richly specific. The plays are rooted in their place and time, suffused with authenticity and real human heartbeats. This specificity helps the work resonate broadly by showing us the human desires, failings, kindness, disappointment, and resilience that connect us all. “All my plays are about people who have been marginalized,” Nottage has said. One of her earliest full-length plays, *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* carries the seeds of so many of the genres, explorations, and human characterizations across her canon. At the play's heart are the essential questions that animate Nottage's oeuvre: How do we make the life we want to live? What do we do with our crumbs of joy?

“*Crumbs from the Table of Joy* is the play that launched the career of Lynn Nottage,” said Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahan**. “Told through the lens of memory, the story takes place at a pivotal moment in young Ernestine's life and a turning point in 20th century American society. At times funny and beautifully moving, *Crumbs* is a seemingly simple story that grows in emotional complexity as it unfolds. By the play's conclusion, Ernestine stands at a crossroads that could lead in any number of directions, liberated by the power by her own imagination. Many of the themes Ernestine muses over in the play become the seeds of Nottage's later plays – and the foundation from which she blossomed into a two-time Pulitzer Prize awardee and cemented her reputation as America's greatest living playwright.”

“Lynn Nottage's language in *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* is a pool of never-ending delicious fruit,” said **Bianca LaVerne Jones**, who directs the Lantern's production. “Her brilliant well of connections sends us into

our own worlds thirsty for honesty. This is my first Lynn Nottage play and I am excited to feed this audience. They are going to love *Crumbs*.”

Lantern Theater Company will delve into the world of *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* on its **Lantern Searchlight blog**, available online at lanterntheater.org/searchlight. Articles will be published throughout the production’s run, exploring the extraordinary range of playwright Lynn Nottage’s works and inspirations, behind the scenes conversations with the artists, and more.

Tickets for *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* are \$28 – \$45 and are available online at www.lanterntheater.org or by calling the Lantern Box Office at **(215) 829-0395**. Discounts are available for under age 30, seniors, U.S. military personnel, and groups of 10 or more. Performances of *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* will take place at **St. Stephen’s Theater**, located at 923 Ludlow Street in Center City Philadelphia. Face masks are welcome, but not required.

About the Lantern Artists

New York-based director and actor **Bianca LaVerne Jones** makes her Philadelphia debut with the Lantern’s production of *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*. In 2021, she made her Broadway debut as associate director of *Chicken & Biscuits*; other credits include productions with Baltimore Center Stage, Syracuse Stage, Asolo Repertory Theatre, Pittsburgh Public Theater, Pittsburgh Playwrights, HERE Arts, Teatro LATEA, Miles Square Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem, Billie Holiday Theater, MCC Theater, Ambassador Theatre, Carne Theater, and the African-American Research Library and Cultural Center. Jones is the first African American woman to graduate with a master’s degree in directing from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, and her acting training includes North Carolina School of the Arts, SUNY Purchase Acting Conservatory, and the Yale School of Drama.

Morgan Charéce Hall returns to the Lantern in the role of Ernestine Crump, the Crump family’s 17-year-old daughter who serves as our guide through the play. Previously seen on the Lantern stage as Mariane in *Tartuffe*, Nina in *The Royale*, Gwendolen in *Travesties*, and Margaret More in *A Man for All Seasons*, Hall’s other credits include productions with Arden Theatre Company, Theatre Horizon, Fulton Theatre, and InterAct Theatre Company’s LobstahLab.

Monet Debose makes her Lantern debut as Ermina Crump, the Crump family’s outspoken younger daughter. Originally from Houston, Debose’s Philadelphia credits include the title role in James Ijames’ commissioned play *Media/Medea*, as well as productions with Arden Theatre Company, Theatre Horizon, Theatre in the X, and Azuka Theatre.

Walter DeShields makes his Lantern debut as Godfrey Crump, the girls' father. Hailing from South Philadelphia, DeShields' local credits include productions with Arden Theatre Company, Bristol Riverside Theatre, and Theatre in the X, which he co-founded in 2013 and where he now serves as co-artistic director. Outside of theater, DeShields also works as a lead facilitator for several sexual health education workshops with young people in Philadelphia.

Barrymore Award-winner **Brett Ashley Robinson** also appears on the Lantern stage for the first time as Lily Ann Green, the girls' independent and free-thinking aunt. A company member of Applied Mechanics and The Wilma Theater's HotHouse, Robinson's credits include The Wilma Theater, Theatre Exile, InterAct Theatre Company, Under the Radar Festival, Ars Nova Ant Fest, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Pig Iron, Arden Theatre Company, Theatre Horizon, Geva, and The Bearded Ladies, as well as devising her own work that includes *Re-Enactment* and *Patricia!*

Barrymore Award-winning actress **Hillary Parker** makes her Lantern debut as Gerte Schulte, a recent German immigrant woman who marries widower Godfrey. Parker has worked locally with InterAct Theatre Company, Quintessence Theatre Group, The Media Theatre, and The Resident Theatre Company, as well as productions with Hangar Theatre, Capital Repertory Theatre, Hope Rep, Saratoga Shakespeare, Peterborough Players, and Connecticut Rep.

Director Bianca LaVerne Jones has assembled a talented creative team that includes scenic designer **Dirk Durossette** (*Fabulation*, *Measure for Measure*, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, and *QED*), costume designer **Leigh Paradise** (*The Plague*, *Molly Sweeney*), lighting designer **Tydell Williams** (*Tartuffe*, *Twelfth Night*), sound designer **Christopher Colucci** (38th Lantern production, including *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol*, *Tartuffe*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Travesties*), and **Dr. Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon** as production dramaturgy consultant (*The Royale*). **Nicole Perry** and **DeWanda Smith Soeder** make their Lantern debuts as the production's intimacy coach/choreographer and cultural competency consultant, respectively. Lantern 2023/24 Season Professional Apprentice **Leah Jackson** is assistant director, alongside longtime Lantern Stage Manager **Rebecca Smith**.

About Lantern Theater Company

Founded in 1994 and celebrating its 30th anniversary during the 2023/24 season, 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 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 people in 15 countries and all 50 states.

Following *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*, Lantern Theater Company's 30th anniversary season continues with the Lantern's annual adaptation of **Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol**, a Philadelphia holiday tradition co-created by local theater artists **Anthony Lawton, Christopher Colucci, and Thom Weaver (Press Opening: Sunday, December 3, 2023, at 2 p.m.)**; **Faith Healer** from legendary Irish playwright **Brian Friel**, directed by longtime Lantern artistic collaborator **Peter DeLaurier (Press Opening: Wednesday, February 7, 2024, at 7 p.m.)**; and **William Shakespeare's** lyrical and hilarious **The Comedy of Errors**, directed by Lantern Artistic Director **Charles McMahon (Press Opening: Wednesday, May 22, 2024, at 7 p.m.)**. More information is available online at **www.lanterntheater.org**.

Lantern Theater Company – 2023/24 Season
30TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON
FACT SHEET
Crumbs from the Table of Joy

WRITTEN BY:

Lynn Nottage

DIRECTED BY:

Bianca LaVerne Jones

CAST:

Monet Debose as Ermina Crump
Walter DeShields as Godfrey Crump
Morgan Charéce Hall as Ernestine Crump
Hillary Parker as Gerte Schulte
Brett Ashley Robinson as Lily Ann Green

CREATIVE TEAM:

Bianca LaVerne Jones, Director
Dirk Durossette, Scenic Designer
Leigh Paradise, Costume Designer
Tydell Williams, Lighting Designer
Christopher Colucci, Sound Designer
Kimmika Williams-Witherspoon, Production Dramaturgy Consultant
Nicole Perry, Intimacy Coach / Choreographer
DeWanda Smith Soeder, Cultural Competency Consultant
Rebecca Smith, Stage Manager
Leah Jackson, Assistant Director

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TICKET INFORMATION:

Online: www.lanterntheater.org
By Phone: (215) 829-0395

TICKET PRICING:

\$28 – \$45 / Under Age 30: \$25

PERFORMANCES:

Thursday, November 9 – Sunday, December 10, 2023

PREVIEWS:

Thursday, November 9 at 7 p.m.
Friday, November 10 at 8 p.m.
Saturday, November 11 at 8 p.m.
Sunday, November 12 at 2 p.m.

Tuesday, November 14 at 6:30 p.m.

OPENING NIGHT PERFORMANCE:

Wednesday, November 15 at 7 p.m.

REGULAR RUN:

Wednesday at 2 p.m. on November 22 [AIC] and November 29 [AIC] (*no performance December 6*)

Wednesday at 7 p.m. on November 22 and November 29 (*no performance December 6*)

Thursday at 7 p.m. on November 16, November 30, and December 7 (*no performance November 23*)

Friday at 8 p.m. on November 17, November 24, and December 1 (*no performance December 8*)

Saturday at 2 p.m. on November 18, November 25, December 2, and December 9

Saturday at 8 p.m. on November 18, November 25, December 2, and December 9

Sunday at 2 p.m. on November 19 [AIC], November 26 [AIC], December 3, and December 10

CLOSING PERFORMANCE:

Sunday, December 10 at 2 p.m.

ARTISTS IN CONVERSATION [AIC]

Moderated post-show discussions with the cast immediately follow 2 p.m. performances on Sunday, November 19; Wednesday, November 22; Sunday, November 26; and Wednesday, November 29. Lantern Resident Dramaturg **Meghan Winch** will lead the discussions.

PLAY SYNOPSIS:

Just arrived in Brooklyn from the South, the Crump family is seeking their place in the Philadelphia-based Father Divine movement – but their two brilliant daughters on the cusp of adulthood are chafing at their father's religious strictures. Their big dreams for the future are encouraged by their lively, fearless, free-thinking, communist Aunt Lily. This dramatic gem from two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner Lynn Nottage gently reveals the funny and touching struggles of a family trying to make a fresh start in a strange world full of temptations and surprises.

PERFORMANCE VENUE:

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

HEALTH & SAFETY PROTOCOLS:

Face masks are welcome, but not required.