FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – February 12, 2018

McCARTER PRESENTS THE 15th ANNIVERSARY PRODUCTION OF REGINA TAYLOR’S CROWNS

Revised by writer/director Regina Taylor, Crowns features new music and lyrics, new movement, and a new focus. The production runs March 13 – April 1

A joyous musical celebration!

MARCH 13 – APRIL 1

PRINCETON, NJ: Fifteen years after its world premiere at McCarter Theatre Center, Crowns is returning. When Yolanda’s brother is killed on the streets of Chicago, the shaken teenager is sent to live with her grandmother in South Carolina, where she embarks on a journey toward discovering her place in the world, and in her family. Produced in association with Long Wharf Theatre, Crowns runs March 13 – April 1 in McCarter’s Matthews Theatre.

In anticipation of the anniversary production, Crowns has been revisited by creator and director Regina Taylor, with the narrative being told from the teen’s perspective as she deals with her past and her newfound sense of self. The music and movement have been refreshed, with the talents of collaborating composers Jaret Landon, Diedre Murray, and Drama Desk award winner (In Transit) Chesney Snow creating a lush and captivating new musical soundscape merging gospel, soul, and hip-hop.
Inspired by the best-selling book by Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry, Crowns weaves faith and fashion together into an inspirational, joyous coming-of-age musical celebration of triumphant African American women, their church hats, and the traditions and love passed from generation to generation. A show called “warm, wise, and wonderful” by The Star-Ledger, Crowns is the winner of numerous Helen Hayes Awards (including Best Production, Best Musical, and Best Director) and is one of the most produced works in the United States.

McCarter Artistic Director Emily Mann said: “Crowns is one of the most beloved productions in the history of this theater, and represents a great bringing together of communities and generations. It’s an amazing story about women with the grit, the courage and the faith to carry on and keep moving forward. I’m deeply proud and incredibly excited to see it reborn on the Matthews Stage.”

Crowns features renowned gospel vocalist Shari Addison (Mother Shaw) alongside on-the-rise actress and Rider University graduate Gabrielle Beckford as Yolanda. Shari and Gabrielle are joined by a collection of Broadway veterans including Lawrence Clayton (The Color Purple), Rebecca E. Covington (Beautiful: The Carole King Musical), gospel vocalist and songwriter Latrice Crawford (Diary of a Church Girl), Stephanie Pope (Pippin), and Danielle K. Thomas (Avenue Q). Additionally, each performance of Crowns will include a featured soloist from the Central New Jersey area (casting TBA).

The design team includes Choreographer Dianne McIntyre, Musical Director Jaret Landon, Composers Diedre Murray and Chesney Snow, Set and Projections by Caite Hevner, Costumes by Emilio Sosa, Lighting by Bradley King, Sound by Robert Kaplowitz, Wig, Hair, and makeup by J. Jared Janas and Dave Bova, and Projection Design by Rasean Davonte Johnson. Musical Director Jaret Landon will be joined each night in performance by Drumfolk Riddim Specialist David Pleasant. Full bios for cast and design team below.

ABOUT WRITER AND DIRECTOR REGINA TAYLOR
Regina Taylor (Writer/Director) is elated to return to Crowns at McCarter and Long Wharf. Ms. Taylor was honored as the 2017 Denzel Washington Chair Fordham University at Lincoln Center where she directed her play Magnolia. She contributed to the Princeton and Slavery Plays at the McCarter Theatre that featured work by Emily Mann, Kwame Kwei Amah, Jackie Sibblies Drury, Nathan Alan Davis, Dipika Guha, and Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins. Writing credits include: Trinity River Plays (Edgerton Award), Drowning Crow (Broadway), stop.reset. (Signature Theater Residency 5). Taylor is Artistic Associate at Goodman Theatre and one of its most produced playwrights. Acting credits include: First African American Juliet on Broadway in Romeo and Juliet (Belasco Theater) First African American lead in Masterpiece Theater’s Cora Unashamed. Taylor received a Golden Globe Award for Best Lead Performance for the TV Series I’ll Fly Away. Movies include: Clockers, Courage Under Fire, and Lean on Me.

Click through for a preview of Crowns with writer/director Regina Taylor.
ABOUT THE CAST AND DESIGN TEAM

Clockwise from top left: Writer/Director Regina Taylor with actors Shari Addison, Gabrielle Beckford, Lawrence Clayton, Rebecca E. Covington, Latice Crawford, Stephanie Pope, and Danielle K. Thomas.


**Gabrielle Beckford** (Yolanda) is honored to be making her McCarter Theatre debut! She is a NYC native from Queens and recent BFA Musical Theatre graduate from Rider University. Repertory Theatre credits include Thingamajig Theatre Company’s AIDA, Hairspray, Big River and Sister Act at the Pagosa Springs Center for the Arts. Regional Theatre credits include BEOBE Production Company’s All Shook Up at the Laguna Beach Playhouse.
Lawrence Clayton (Man) most recently appeared on Broadway in the Tony, Grammy and Emmy Award winning Broadway revival production of The Color Purple. Other appearances include Bells Are Ringing, It Ain’t Nothin but the Blues, The Civil War, Once upon a Mattress, and Dreamgirls. Off-Broadway includes Crowns at Second Stage, (Audelco Award), Saturn Returns and Romance in Hard Times at The Public Theater. Regional audiences have seen him in productions of The Christians, Damn Yankees, Big River, Jesus Christ Superstar, and Avenue X. On the small screen Lawrence has appeared in episodes of Elementary, Law and Order SVU, Homeland, The Good Wife, The Big C, Deadline, Law and Order: CI, and the made for TV movie Mary and Rhoda. He can be seen in the upcoming film Mike, Mike Tan.

Rebecca E. Covington (Jeanette) is very excited and honored to be making her McCarter Theatre debut with this special show! She was most recently seen on Broadway in Beautiful: The Carole King Musical as Janelle Woods! Other credits include: Broadway: Motown the Musical (OBC)! National/International Tours Ain’t Misbehavin’, Motown the Musical, Beautiful: The Carole King Musical, Mamma Mia, and Thoroughly Modern Millie! You can find her on Twitter @RoRoCov or on Instagram @RoRoWebb.

Latice Crawford (Velma) Through her life-transforming music and soul stirring performances, singer-songwriter Latice Crawford has become a favorite in the gospel community. Gifted with a bold, powerful voice, Crawford’s cadre of fans have come to know that the unique musical experience the Bronx, New York native delivers stems from a story of triumphs and struggles, which she passionately shares in her music. Crawford first gained national notoriety during her breakout performances on Season 2 of BET’s Sunday Best, where she achieved second runner up. She released her billboard charting self-titled debut album in 2014 and in 2016 released her sophomore project, Diary of A Church Girl. The critically acclaimed work garnered Crawford a Stellar Award nomination.

Stephanie Pope (Wanda) is a native of Harlem, NY and is thrilled to be a part of this production of Regina Taylor’s Crowns. She most recently appeared in the Attic Theater Company’s World Premiere of Jericho (Mrs. Mosca). Broadway credits include the revival of Pippin (Astaire Award nomination, ACCA Award), Chicago (Velma Kelly), Thoroughly Modern Millie (Muzzy Van Hossmere), Fosse (Leading Player), Smokey Joe’s Cafe (Brenda), A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum (Gymnasia) and Jelly’s Last Jam (The Hunnies). Regional credits include Newsies (Medda Larkin), The Odyssey (Circe), Nine (Liliane LaFleur), Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom (Dussie Mae). TV credits include Law and Order: SVU and HBO's Oz. Her CD, Now’s The Time To Fall In Love, is available on Amazon.com. @lapope64.

Danielle K. Thomas (Mabel) is so excited be part of this product with this amazing team! She is here "on loan" from her residence at New World Stages in Avenue Q, as Gary Coleman. She was also recently at Paper Mill as "Mrs. Corry" in Mary Poppins. Broadway/Off Broadway: Avenue Q, 1st & National/European Tour: Avenue Q, Hair, Cinderella. Europe: Little Shop of Horrors, Jesus Christ Superstar. Regional: Caroline, or Change; Suessical; Crowns; Big River.
Film/TV: Crooklyn, Pop Foul (Bend Film Festival Best Actress), Rescue Me, Smash, NYC 22, The Michael J Fox Show, The Affair, Deadbeat, Jessica Jones. Broadway Inspirational Voices soprano choir member and Outreach Coordinator. Thanks Telsey & Co. and TKO Agency.


Jaret Landon (Music Director/Original Compositions) is honored to serve as Music Director and Composer / Arranger for McCarter Theatre’s production of Crowns. He is a film composer, music director, and vocal arranger. Favorite theater credits include Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar and Grill (Stage 773 | Chicago, IL), Black Odyssey (Denver Center Theatre Company), and the pre-Broadway run of Born For This (The Broad Stage | Los Angeles). Jaret served as Assistant Orchestrator for Seasons 14 and 15 of Fox’s American Idol. Love and Light to all! Social Media: @jaretlandon.

Diedre Murray (Original Compositions/Arrangements) is an innovative composer, musician, producer and curator. From the 1970’s through early 90’s, she pioneered the use of the cello as a jazz music instrument. She is a Pulitzer Prize Finalist for the chamber opera Running Man and a two-time Obie winner for Running Man and for Eli’s Comin’. She’s collaborated extensively with Music Theatre Group and Diane Paulus. Works include Running Man, Fangs, Best of Both Worlds and You Don’t Miss the Water. She wrote the arrangements for the Tony Award winning The Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess. Additionally Ms. Murray has composed for pieces written and/or produced by Lynn Nottage, Carl Hancock Rux, The Roots, Kathryn Walker, Cornelius Eady, Blondell Cummings, Risa Jaroslaw and Marcus Gardley, among others.

Chesney Snow (Original Compositions) is a Drama Desk award-winning Brooklyn based theatre artist and songwriter. Recently originated the role of Boxman on Broadway’s In Transit. Considered a pioneering figure in American beatbox culture he founded the American Beatbox Championships and executive produced the documentary American Beatboxer which was placed in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Harvard University Hip Hop archives. He twice headlined Carnegie Hall with DCINY and has collaborated on stage as a beatboxer with many legendary artists including KRS One and Nile Rogers, and has opened for artists such as MC Lyte, Snoop Dogg, and Immortal Technique. His critically acclaimed autobiographical
show The Unwritten Law directed by Rebecca Arends is being presented in Dixon Place Theatre’s 2018 production season. National tour: Vocalosity. Select NY credits: Burn This, Golden Boy, Antigone.


Bradley King (Lighting Design) Broadway: The Great Comet (Tony, OCC, Drama Desk Awards). Recent Off-Broadway: The Last Match (Roundabout), The Treasurer (Playwrights Horizons), Animal (Atlantic), Hadestown (NYTW, Drama Desk nom.), Empanada Loca (Labyrinth; Drama Desk nom), Every Angel is Brutal (Clubbed Thumb), Preludes (LCT3). Regional: Alley, ART, Berkeley Rep, the Guthrie, Hudson Valley Shakespeare, the Old Globe, South Coast Rep, Williamstown. Opera: Bard Summerscape, Boston Lyric, Boston Early Music, Kentucky Opera, Opera Omaha, Vancouver Opera, Virginia Opera. MFA, NYU. www.bradleykingld.com.

Robert Kaplowitz (Sound Design) has spent the last 24 years designing sound and composing; he has been honored with an OBIE for Sustained Excellence in Sound Design and a Tony for Fela! He owes much of his success to James Houghton’s inspirational mentorship during their 4 years together at the Eugene O’Neill Playwrights Conference. Among his 300+ artistic credits are designs for Ms. Taylor’s stop. reset, and Urban Zulu Mambo and, here at the McCarter, Emily Mann’s production of Sarah Treem’s The How and the Why. He also composes musicals, creates museum installations, runs Nine Hostage Arts in Philadelphia, teaches at Princeton and loves his family more than anything else.
J. Jared Janas (Wig, Hair, and Makeup Design) Sunset Boulevard, Bandstand, Indecent, The Visit, The Real Thing, Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar & Grill, Motown, Peter and the Starcatcher, The Gershwins’ Porgy and Bess, All About Me, and Next to Normal. Recent off-Broadway: The Low Road (Public), The Amateurs (Vineyard), Jerry Springer the Opera (New Group), Fire and Air (Classic Stage), Mankind (Playwrights Horizons), and Yours Unfaithfully (Mint, Drama Desk Nomination). Films include Angelica and The Night Before. TV includes Six by Sondheim, Scream Queens, Gotham, Mozart in the Jungle, and Inside Amy Schumer.


Rasean Davonte Johnson (Projection Design) is delighted to be working with the McCarter Theatre Center. A Chicago based video artist and theatrical designer, he has had the opportunity to work regionally with institutions such as Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Yale Repertory Theatre, Geva Theatre Center, Berkshire Theatre Group, Alliance Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Court Theatre, The Hypocrites, The Kitchen Theatre, Teatro Vista, American Theatre Company, Collaboration, Manual Cinema, and internationally with the Ningbo Song and Dance Company. Additionally his installation work has been seen at the Yale Art Gallery, The Bridgeport Film Festival, the Logan Center for the Arts, and the Columbus International Film Festival. MFA Yale School of Drama. raseandavontejohnson.com.

David Pleasant (Drumfolk Riddim Specialist) is a Drumfolk master, choreographer, composer, independent scholar and writer. His work spans categories of jazz, pre-Spirituals, dance theater, Hip-Hop, Broadway, TV, recording, and documentary film. Pleasant has spent over 30+ years introducing Gullah-Geechee (early African American cultural forms) to national and international audiences. He is an award winning performing artist who has collaborated across various genre lines with artists including: Audra Mc Donald, Wynton Marsalis, STEP AFRIKA, Cecil Taylor, Erykah Badu, The ABC News Division, Urban Bush Women, Arrested Development, Charles Gayle and others. As an arts-education pioneer, he guest lectures at a variety of institutions including: Smithsonian Institute, Fulbright Senior Specialist seminars, Schomburg Center NYPL, NYU Encuentro, Ministry of Education, Rome and more.

About Long Wharf Theatre
In its 53rd season, Long Wharf (Joshua Borenstein, Managing Director), is recognized as a leader in American theatre, producing fresh and imaginative revivals of classics and modern plays, rediscoveries of neglected works and a variety of American premieres. More than 30 productions have transferred virtually intact to Broadway or Off-Broadway, some of which include Napoli, Brooklyn; Satchmo at the Waldorf; My Name is Asher Lev; February House; The Glass Menagerie; the Pulitzer Prize-winning plays Wit by Margaret Edson; The Shadow Box by Michael Cristofer; and The Gin Game by D.L. Coburn. The theater is an incubator of new works, including Meteor Shower by Steve Martin and The Most Beautiful Room in New York by
David Shire and Adam Gopnik. Long Wharf has received NY Drama Critics Awards, Obie Awards, the Margo Jefferson Award for Production of New Works, a Special Citation from the Outer Critics Circle and the Tony® Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre.

**About McCarter Theatre Center**
McCarter Theatre Center is one of America’s leading regional theaters and is the only organization in this country that is a professional producing theater and simultaneously a presenter of major performing artists. Winner of the 1994 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, recent world premiere plays include Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike (2013 Tony Award - Best Play); Miss Witherspoon; The Brother/Sister Plays; Me, Myself & I; Having Our Say; The Convert; and Crowns. Other plays include Broadway productions of Translations, Anna in the Tropics (Pulitzer Prize), and Electra. McCarter is a presenter of world renowned artists such as Lang Lang, Dance Theatre of Harlem, Wynton Marsalis, David Sedaris and many others. Our education/outreach efforts serve tens of thousands through student matinees, in-school residencies, adult education classes, and more. McCarter is supported by contributions from Princeton University, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, many corporations and foundations and from over 2,000 individuals. Discover more at mccarter.org.

**PRODUCTION FACTS**
*Crowns* - Creative, Production, and Design Team
Artistic Director/Resident Playwright: Emily Mann
Interim Managing Director: Harold Wolpert
Produced in association with Long Wharf Theatre
Written and Directed by: Regina Taylor
Adapted from the Book by: Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry
Choreographer: Dianne McIntyre
Music Director: Jaret Landon
Original Compositions: Jaret Landon, Diedre Murray, and Chesney Snow
Arrangements: Diedre Murray
Drumfolk Riddim Specialist: David Pleasant
Set and Projection Design: Caite Hevner
Costume Design: Emilio Sosa
Lighting Design: Bradley King
Sound Design: Robert Kaplowitz
Wig, Hair, and Makeup Design: J. Jared Janas and Dave Bova
Projection Design: Rasean Davonte Johnson
Casting: Telsey + Company / Rebecca Scholl, CSA
Dance Captain: Danielle K. Thomas
Production Stage Manager: Cheryl Mintz
Stage Manager: Alison Cote
Director of Production: David York
Resident Producer: Debbie Bisno
The Cast
Mother Shaw: Shari Addison
Yolanda: Gabrielle Beckford
Man: Lawrence Clayton
Jeanette: Rebecca E. Covington
Velma: Lattice Crawford
Wanda: Stephanie Pope
Mabel: Danielle K. Thomas

Musicians
Piano, keyboards, and trumpet: Jaret Landon
Drumfolk Riddim Specialist: David Pleasant

Community Soloists
We are pleased to introduce our COMMUNITY GUEST SOLOISTS from the greater Princeton area. They will perform “How I Got Over” on the dates listed below.

Lois Alexander (Ewing Township, NJ)
Thursday, March 22 – 7:30pm
Sunday, March 25 – 2pm

Tracie Daves (Trenton, NJ)
Friday, March 23 – 8pm
Saturday, March 24 – 2pm

Karen Jones (West Trenton, NJ)
Thursday, March 15 – 7:30pm
Saturday, March 24 – 8pm

Twanda Muslim (Plainfield, NJ)
Sunday, March 18 – 2pm
Thursday, March 29 – 7:30pm

Original compositions and arrangements for this production have been provided by Jaret Landon, Diedre Murray, David Pleasant, Chesney Snow, and Regina Taylor, except for the following songs:

Time to Get Ready - Carol Maillard and Louise Robinson
The Hat Queen Rules - Fred Carl and Kirsten Childs
Run and Tell That - Jaret Landon and Jade Maya Lampert Smith
Too Many Hats - Gary Dennis Hines
Philadelphia-based American Hats LLC has partnered with McCarter to adorn the Matthews Theatre lobbies for the run of Crowns.

Crowns was originally produced at McCarter and Second Stage Theatre, New York City.

Crowns was originally commissioned by McCarter and was developed with the assistance of the Sundance Theatre Institute.

Crowns is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., New York.

The Actors and Stage Managers in this production are members of Actors’ Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

Crowns is made possible in part by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts and by funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. McCarter is supported by Princeton University, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and over 2,000 individuals, corporations, and foundations. McCarter Theatre Center is located at 91 University Place in Princeton, NJ. For more information, please visit mccarter.org.

Crowns is sponsored by PNC Bank and Migrations, a Princeton Community Collaboration.

**Ticket Information and Performance Schedule**
Performances for Crowns run March 13 – April 1 in the Matthews Theatre. Single tickets range from $25 - $97.50 and are on sale now online at mccarter.org, by phone at (609) 258-2787, or in person at the McCarter Theatre Center Ticket Office, located at 91 University Place in Princeton.

Crowns runs two hours, with one 15 minute intermission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>March 14</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>March 15</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>March 16</td>
<td>8 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>8 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opening Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>March 18</td>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dialogue on Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>March 22</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>8 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>March 24</td>
<td>8 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pride Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open Caption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>March 25</td>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>March 29</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>8 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>8 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special Events and Engagement Programs**

**Local Women in Their Crowns**
A collaboration between McCarter and the Arts Council of Princeton

Inspired by the book of the same name from which Crowns was created, this visual storytelling community project will capture portraits and the shared stories of black women of all ages and backgrounds. The culminating exhibition will run at the Princeton Public Library and Princeton Theological Seminary through May 31 and at McCarter now through April 1. Produced in conjunction with the Arts Council of Princeton. A talk with the photographers will take place on March 29 at 6:30 p.m. at the Arts Council of Princeton. Visit arts council of princeton.org for more information.

**Inside Story**
Join us 45 minutes before any performance for a talk led by a member of McCarter’s artistic staff. Hear about what inspired the play, its unique creation and style, and much more. Additional info will offer a few things to look and listen out for as you experience Crowns in performance. Each Inside Story will take place inside the Matthews Theatre.

**Post-Show Discussions**
Post-show discussions at McCarter are highly interactive audience-based conversations facilitated by a member of McCarter’s artistic staff, often featuring cast members. These discussions focus on a range of topics including how artistic choices were made for the production, the actors’ process, and reflections and questions from audience members. Post-show discussions occur directly following the 2 p.m. performance on Sunday, March 25 and the 7:30 p.m. performance on Thursday, March 29. No RSVP or ticket is required to attend these discussions; they are free and open to the public.

For further inquiries and more information, contact: Tom Miller, Director of Public Relations tmiller@mccarter.org or 609.258.6524. McCarter Theatre Center is at 91 University Place, Princeton, NJ 08540 | mccarter.org.