

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



**Baltimore Center Stage Presents  
ArtsCentric Production of  
*Crowns***

**A new addition to BCS' 60th Anniversary Season**

**Performances Run February 11 - March 5, 2023**

**Baltimore, MD:** Baltimore Center Stage (BCS) is pleased to present ArtsCentric's new production of **Regina Taylor's *Crowns***, a celebratory musical play in which hats become a springboard for an exploration of Black history and identity. Called "an artful amalgamation of oral history, fashion show, and musical theater" by *TheatreMania*, *Crowns* will play at BCS' Pearlstone theater from February 11 - March 5, 2023. Reviewing press are invited to the 7:30 PM performance on Thursday, February 16.

"Our partnership with ArtsCentric highlights BCS' continued commitment to community and amplifying organizations that align with our mission to provide access for all," said BCS Artistic Director **Stephanie Ybarra**. "We are looking forward to welcoming the incredible artists from ArtsCentric to join us on the BCS stage for this lively, uplifting, and engaging musical play."

"In a time when conflict and confusion seems to be the recurring theme on our daily news, it is refreshing to find a story that centers in pure joy. It is even more refreshing for ArtsCentric to join up with Baltimore Center Stage to once again show the power of black joy and its place in the Baltimore community," said ArtCentric Director **Kevin S. McAllister**. "Last season's production of *Dreamgirls* was wonderful and we can't wait to bring the community our production of *Crowns*. This hilariously touching musical is a celebration of black history, heritage, and the iconic fashions that make up the black church and we've got seven performers who are going to blow your minds. The church community in Baltimore is huge and we can't wait to celebrate them. The amount of fun we are about to have on that stage will be one for the ages and we can't wait to see all your smiling faces in the lobby after the show."

*Crowns*, which is adapted from the book by **Michael Cunningham** and **Craig Marberry**, is seen through the eyes of Yolanda, a young woman who has come down South to stay with her aunt after her brother is killed in Brooklyn. Hats are everywhere, and the characters use the hats to tell tales, everything from the etiquette of hats to their historical and contemporary social functioning—there is a hat for every occasion, from flirting to churchgoing to funerals to baptisms. Featuring a tuneful, gospel-driven score, *Crowns* is about embracing one’s cultural significance and heritage while staying fiercely independent.

This production of *Crowns* is directed by Kevin S. McAllister with musical direction by Cedric D. Lyles. Designers and Creative Team include Shelbi Nelson (Assistant Director), Shalyce Hemby (Choreographer), Nathan Scavilla (Music Supervisor), Emily Lotz (Scenic Designer), Mike Durst (Lighting Designer), Lawrence Boggs, Jr. (Costume Designer), Keith Person (Sound Designer), Robert Poole (Props Manager), and Jordan Ross (Stage Manager). The full cast will be announced at a later date.

Tickets for *Crowns* can be purchased at [centerstage.org/plays-and-events/XXX](http://centerstage.org/plays-and-events/XXX). Media members may request performance attendance by emailing Bryan Buttler ([bryan@bryanbuttlamediarelations.com](mailto:bryan@bryanbuttlamediarelations.com)). Additional community programming will be announced at a later date.

For general information, visit [www.centerstage.org](http://www.centerstage.org) or call the Box Office at 410.332.0033

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Baltimore Center Stage’s first priority is the health, safety, and well-being of our audiences, staff, artists, and guests. Our current policy is that masks must be worn at Baltimore Center Stage and may only be removed in designated eating and drinking areas. For the most up to date COVID Safety Guidelines, visit our website: [www.centerstage.org/visit/covid-19-response](http://www.centerstage.org/visit/covid-19-response).

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BCS:  
[www.centerstage.org](http://www.centerstage.org)

#### **ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT**

**REGINA TAYLOR** is the author of *OO-BLA-DEE*, which received its world premiere at the Goodman Theatre in 1999 and later transferred to the La Jolla Playhouse. In April 2000, *OO-BLA-DEE* received the American Theatre Critics/Steinberg New Play Award. Ms. Taylor’s other projects include *CROWNS*, which premiered at McCarter Theatre in their 2002-2003 season, an adaptation of *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* for the Alliance Theatre, *THE DREAMS OF SARAH BREEDLOVE*, about famed black entrepreneur madam C.J. Walker, for the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, and the book for *THE COLOR PURPLE*. Her play *DROWNING CROW* (an adaptation of Chekhov’s *THE SEAGULL*) was produced at the Goodman Theatre as part of the 2001 season. Ms.

Taylor's other writing credits include *URBAN ZULU MAMBO*, *ESCAPE FROM PARADISE*, *WATERMELON RINDS*, *INSIDE THE BELLY OF THE BEAST*, *MUDTRACKS*, *BETWEEN THE LINES*, and *BEHIND EVERY GOOD MAN*. Her acting credits include roles on Broadway, Off-Broadway, and in numerous regional theatres. Her film credits include "Clockers," "Losing Isaiah," "Lean on Me," "A Family Thing," "Courage Under Fire" (with Denzel Washington), and "The Negotiator" (with Samuel L. Jackson). Television credits include "Children of the Dust" with Sidney Poitier and "The Education of Max Bickford." For her role as Lilly Harper on the television series "I'll Fly Away," Ms. Taylor won an NAACP Image Award and received the Golden Globe Award for Best Leading Dramatic Actress.

## **ABOUT THE BOOK AUTHOR**

**CRAIG MARBERRY** was born and raised in Chicago and went to high school in Gary, Indiana, where he wrote a weekly column for "Info," the community newspaper. He attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, where he won the Charles E. Merrill fellowship to spend his junior year studying at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. He also won the school's first annual essay contest and in 1981 was named Morehouse Man of the Year. After graduating with honors with a degree in English literature, he was awarded the Thomas J. Watson fellowship to conduct independent study of Third World media at the University of West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. He then earned his Master's from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Marberry, who has written for "The Washington Post" and "Essence" magazine, worked as a television reporter for six years before launching a video production business named Info Video, which he ran for twelve years. His clients included Nabisco, American Express, and Wachovia. When one of his clients needed still photographs for a publicity campaign, Marberry hired commercial photographer Michael Cunningham for the job. The two men had fallen out of touch for five years when, in the summer of 1998, Marberry heard that Cunningham was compiling a collection of photographs of African-American women wearing church hats. Immediately, Marberry contacted Cunningham and proposed that the two team up on the project. In June of 1999, Marberry began writing a book proposal for "Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats" (Doubleday/November 2000). From the very beginning, Marberry believed his collection of oral histories would translate well to the stage. In November of 1999, a year before "Crowns" was published, he slipped a mock-up of the book to Emily Mann, the Tony award-winning artistic director of the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey. After reviewing Marberry's collection of narratives, Mann agreed that his work would work onstage. She commissioned actress/playwright Regina Taylor, perhaps best known for her starring role in the television series "I'll Fly Away," to write and direct the adaptation. The McCarter Theatre staged the world premiere of *CROWNS* on October 15, 2002. The play then debuted off-Broadway at the Second Stage Theatre in Manhattan on November 13, 2002. Taylor's production set box-office records in nearly every city to which it traveled, including Chicago, Atlanta, and Washington, D.C., where it won the Helen Hayes Award (D.C.'s answer to the Tony Awards). Winning awards in each of the seven categories for which it was nominated, *CROWNS* also swept through the thirty-first Annual Vivian Robinson AUDELCO Awards for Excellence in Black Theatre. (*CROWNS* was awarded Best Musical Production of the Year, Outstanding Ensemble, Outstanding Lighting

Design by Robert Perry, Outstanding Costume Design by Emilio Sosa, Outstanding Direction of a Musical by Regina Taylor, and Outstanding Musical Direction by Linda Twine.) In July of 2000, four months before "Crowns" was published, Marberry began working on his second book: "Spirit of Harlem: A Portrait of America's Most Exciting Neighborhood" (Doubleday/December 2003). A year after he began his research and interviews, Marberry invited Cunningham to join the project. Marberry then persuaded the legendary photographer Gordon Parks, who began his illustrious career in Harlem, to pen the book's foreword. The book won critical acclaim, including praise from "The Washington Post," which made "Spirit of Harlem" an "Our Critics' Picks of the Year" selection, describing it as a "fascinating survey of intriguing Harlemites." Marberry began working on his third book in February of 2003. "Cuttin' Up: Wit and Wisdom from Black Barber Shops" (Doubleday/May 2005) is his first solo project. In December of 2003, Marberry showed an excerpt of "Cuttin' Up" to Molly Smith, Artistic Director of Arena Stage in Washington, D.C. Smith loved the idea and wasted no time. By the following spring, she was ready to adapt "Cuttin' Up" for the stage. Smith approached the multi-talented playwright/director Charles Randolph-Wright—who starred in the original cast of *DREAMGIRLS* and wrote and directed the play *BLUE*, starring Tony award winner Phylicia Rashad. The Arena Stage presented the world premiere of Charles Randolph-Wright's adaptation of "Cuttin' Up" November 4, 2005, through January 1, 2006. The play opened to rave reviews. A popular college lecturer, Marberry has spoken at Barnard College, California Institute of Technology, Columbia University, Fayetteville State University, Fordham University, Morehouse College, North Carolina A&T State University, Roger Williams University, University of North Carolina Greensboro, and Winston-Salem State University, among others. Marberry resides in Greensboro, North Carolina.

#### **ABOUT THE DIRECTOR**

**KEVIN S. MCALLISTER** was most recently cast in the revival of *Caroline or Change* alongside Cassie Levy, Sharon D. Clarke and Broadway legend Chip Zien. He was also recently seen in the hit Broadway musical, *Come From Away*. When not in NYC, he can be seen often on regional stages around Washington D.C where he is a two time Helen Hayes Award winning actor with 12 nominations under his belt. His favorite roles being The Tin Man in *The Wiz*, Coalhouse Walker, Jr. in *Ragtime*, and Tom Collins in *Rent*. Regional venues include The Kennedy Center, Arena Stage, Cleveland Playhouse, Signature Theatre, and Ford's Theatre. Mr. McAllister's opera background has also afforded him the opportunity to perform in Washington National Opera's revival of Kurt Weill's *Lost In The Stars* with Eric Owens. He's participated in several world premieres and workshops with works written by Pasek and Paul, Jeanine Tesori, Rowe and Dempsey and living legend Bruce Hornsby. As an actor, Kevin is a firm believer in the idea of reimagining roles and has often taken on roles not originally written for African-American actors. Regionally, he has played Daddy Warbucks in *Annie*, File in *110 In The Shade*, Murdoch in *Titanic the Musical*, Herman Preysing in *Grand Hotel* and Burrs in *The Wild Party*.

When not on the stage, Kevin is the artistic director of ArtsCentric, a performing arts organization in Baltimore dedicated to re-examining traditional roles in the arts. He has served on the production team of various works that have been featured at Ford's

Theatre, Toby's Dinner Theatre, NextStop Theatre, Olney Theatre and Monumental Theatre Company. He is also a recurring guest lecturer at Montgomery College, American University, Howard University, University of Maryland and in January 2021 will join the Musical Theatre Department at Catholic University. In November 2020, Kevin was nominated as DC's Artist of The Decade by Broadway World for his continued commitment to arts advancement in Maryland/DC region. He was also selected as the Director of the Decade by Broadway World in the Baltimore region.

### **ABOUT BALTIMORE CENTER STAGE**

Founded in 1963 and designated the State Theater of Maryland in 1978, [Baltimore Center Stage](#) provides the highest quality theater and programming for all members of our communities, including youth and families, under the leadership of Artistic Director Stephanie Ybarra. Baltimore Center Stage ignites conversations and imagination by producing an eclectic season of professional productions across two mainstages and an intimate 99-seat theater, through engaging community programs, and with inspiring education programs. Everything we do at Center Stage is led by our core values—chief among them being Access For All. The Baltimore Center Stage mission is heavily rooted in providing active and open accessibility for everyone, regardless of any and all barriers, to our Mainstage performances, education initiatives, and community programming.

### **ABOUT ARTSCENTRIC**

ArtsCentric, Inc. is an African-American performing arts organization: a color-conscious organization committed to reexamining traditional roles in the arts, advancing original stories of specific cultures, and fostering educational advancement to strengthen the community through the power of theatre. ArtsCentric approaches the arts with a color-conscious lens when creating community-oriented and enriched education programs.; specifically, the organization strives to positively impact a broad and diverse audience base, and uphold high standards of quality entertainment, while using the arts to inform, change, and enhance lives, one audience at a time. For more information about ArtsCentric, visit their website [artscentric.org](http://artscentric.org)