

# ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

Molly Smith Artistic Director Edgar Dobie Executive Producer Zelda Fichandler Founding Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Greta Hays/Kirstin Franko press@arenastage.org, 202-600-4056

March 15, 2016

For additional press materials, visit the online press room: arenastage.com/news-press/press-room/press-kits-photos/productions/born-for-this Username: arenapress / Password: arena1516

FULL CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM ANNOUNCED FOR THE WORLD PREMIERE OF
BORN FOR THIS: THE BEBE WINANS STORY
A NEW MUSICAL BY BEBE WINANS AND CHARLES RANDOLPH-WRIGHT
COMING TO ARENA STAGE JULY 1-AUGUST 28, 2016

ARENA STAGE SINGLE TICKETS GO ON SALE TOMORROW, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2016

\*\*\* Featuring BeBe Winans' nephew and niece, Juan Winans and Deborah Joy Winans, as BeBe and CeCe, as well as Chaz Pofahl and Kirsten Wyatt as Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker \*\*\*

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage announces the full cast and creative team for *Born for This: The BeBe Winans Story*, the heartwarming true story of six-time Grammy Award-winning icon *BeBe Winans'* journey to fame. *Born for This*, directed by celebrated director and playwright *Charles Randolph-Wright* (*Motown The Musical*), is a coproduction with the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Ga. where the production runs April 13-May 15, 2016 prior to the Arena Stage production. The new musical, which officially kicks off Arena Stage's 2016/17 season, features original songs and Winans family hits, with a book by Randolph-Wright and Winans. *Born for This* runs July 1-August 28, 2016 in the Kreeger Theater. Tickets go on sale Wednesday, March 16, 2016 at www.arenastage.org.

In *Born for This*, Detroit natives BeBe and CeCe Winans, youngest siblings of the Winans family dynasty, experience the ultimate in culture shocks when invited to join Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's television show *Praise the Lord.* The Winans teenagers become not only television celebrities, they also become like adopted children of the Bakkers, integrating TV evangelism. As BeBe and CeCe encounter fame, fortune and even a young Whitney Houston, BeBe must learn to balance his desire for success with his true calling.

"I love it when the whole family is involved," shares Arena Stage Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. "Casting members of the Winans family themselves in *Born for This* is powerful and audiences will love it. Combined with BeBe's personal and inspiring story and the strong cast and creative team Charles has assembled, our stage will be bubbling over with talent."

-continued-

#### Page 2—Arena Stage announces full company of BeBe Winans' Born for This

"BeBe Winans writes incredible music and has an equally incredible story to accompany that music," comments Randolph-Wright. "When he and his sister left Detroit for Carolina as teenagers, the ultimate coming of age happened and unlikely friendships developed. People who seemingly had nothing in common found a way first to sing together, then become family. Those unique partnerships changed and moved people—something we need right now. I am proud to be a part of this journey, and am thrilled to bring this extraordinary company of actors and tremendous design team to the audiences in Atlanta and D.C."

Universal themes run through this personal story. "When you're a teenager you don't think your life is being recorded for others to learn from, or be healed by, or better yet to find strength through your fears and failures," adds **BeBe Winans**. "Now I know that these were God's plans for my life. We're all born for a purpose. This musical celebrates the journey of finding it."

As previously announced, leading the cast as BeBe and CeCe Winans are Winans family members and accomplished performers Juan Winans and Deborah Joy Winans. Juan is a Grammy Award-nominated singer/songwriter and his sister Deborah Joy is currently filming Greenleaf, the OWN original TV series for which BeBe is an executive music producer. Featured in the cast are Charlotte, N.C.-area favorite Chaz Pofahl as Jim Bakker and Kirsten Wyatt (Broadway's A Christmas Story The Musical) as Tammy Faye Bakker, as well as Kiandra Richardson as Whitney Houston, Nita Whitaker (Pasadena Playhouse's Breaking Through) as Mom Winans, Milton Craig Nealy (Broadway's Motown The Musical, Arena's Akeelah and the Bee) as Pop Winans, Dyllon Burnside (Broadway's Holler If Ya Hear Me) as Michael Winans and Howard, Desmond Sean Ellington as Carvin Winans and Alvin, Brad Raymond as Ronald Winans and Michael Stiggers as Marvin Winans. Also in the cast are Nick Morrett as Bob, Alison Whitehurst as Penny and D.C.-area performers Kurt Boehm (Arena's Fiddler on the Roof) as Jimmy Ray, Gracie Jones (Signature Theatre's Beaches) as Edith/Ensemble and Greg Joubert and Ronald Woodhead as supplemental extras.

The creative team for Born for This includes Choreographer Warren Adams, Music Supervisor Donald Lawrence, Music Director Steven Jamail, Set Designer Neil Patel, Tony Award-winning Costume Designer William Ivey Long, Lighting Designer Jason Lyons, Sound Designer Jesse Stevens, Projection Designer John Narun, Copyist Britt Bonney, Stage Manager Kurt Hall and Assistant Stage Manager Kristen Mary Harris.

Benjamin "BeBe" Winans (Book, Original Music & Lyrics), the inspirational R&B and gospel vocalist, songwriter and producer, was born into the legendary Winans family, the first family of gospel music. Over his distinguished career, he has amassed six Grammy Awards (three solo and three with his sister CeCe), 10 Dove Awards, six Stellar Awards, four NAACP Award and three Soul Train Music Awards. BeBe is a multi-faceted gospel artist with film, TV and Broadway credits and can be heard every Sunday on "The BeBe Experience" on Sirius XM's Heart & Soul channel. His seven solo albums feature guest appearances from Eric Clapton, Stevie Wonder, David Foster, Anita Baker, Whitney Houston and members of the Winans family. Teaming with his younger sister Priscilla "CeCe," the duo first began crossing lines as "adopted children" of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker on the television show *Praise the Lord*, and together they have nine successful gold and platinum recordings. Twitter: @TheBeBeWinans, Instagram: @BeBeWinans, Facebook: facebook.com/bebewinans. www.BeBeWinans.net

Charles Randolph-Wright (Book, Director) is an inaugural resident playwright at Arena Stage where he premiered his plays Love in Afghanistan, Blue and Cuttin' Up and directed Akeelah and the Bee; Sophisticated Ladies and Guys and Dolls (both starring Maurice Hines); Oak and Ivy; Anthems; Señor Discretion Himself; and Ruined. He directed Motown The Musical on Broadway, the national tour and in London. Additional directing credits include the opera Porgy and Bess, Love/Life (starring Brian Stokes Mitchell), Through the Night and They're Playing Our Song (in Portuguese in Brazil). Charles also co-wrote Bea Arthur on Broadway: Just Between Friends. He directed the award-winning film Preaching to the Choir and has written screenplays for HBO, Showtime, Disney and FOX. TV credits include directing Lincoln Heights, South of Nowhere, the "Freestyle" soccer campaign for Nike and BeBe Winans' special America America. He produced and wrote the Showtime series Linc's. www.divatamer.com

#### Page 3—Arena Stage announces full company of BeBe Winans' Born for This

# **Cast Biographies**

Juan Winans (BeBe Winans) is a part of the third generation of Winans performers. Son of Carvin Winans, Sr., Juan began performing at the age of 16 when he along with his older brother and two cousins formed the group Winans Phase 2. Collaborating with writers such as Babyface & Rodney Jerkins, their debut album "We Got Next" went to number one on the Billboard gospel chart and earned Juan a Grammy Award nomination. Since then, he has shared his love for performing on stages around the world and has written for artists including Mary Mary, Lalah Hathaway, Joe, Mack Wilds, Michael Bolton, Heavy D, Beth Hart and others. Juan is currently writing for TV and film while finishing up his first solo album, to be released in summer 2016. <a href="https://www.juanwinans.com">www.juanwinans.com</a>

**Deborah Joy Winans** (CeCe Winans) is delighted to perform alongside her brother, portraying her real-life aunt CeCe Winans. She was previously part of the Women of Faith Conference's national tour. She holds a B.F.A. in theater from Wayne State University and an M.F.A. from California Institute of the Arts. Originally from Detroit, Michigan, she now splits her time between Atlanta and Los Angeles. Deborah Joy previously portrayed her aunt in the Angela Bassett-directed TV movie Whitney. She next stars in the OWN family drama series Greenleaf opposite Keith David and Lynn Whitfield. Instagram: @deborahjoywinans. www.joywinans.com

Chaz Pofahl (Jim Bakker) hails from Charlotte, N.C. Theater credits include Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer (Center For Puppetry Arts); Dracula: The Rock Opera (7 Stages); Avenue Q and Fiddler on the Roof (Cape Fear Regional Theatre); and Coraline, Journey to Oz, Ella's Big Chance, Scrooge, Seussical, And Then They Came for Me, The Borrowers, Macbeth and The Secret Garden (Children's Theatre of Charlotte). Additional credits include The Music Man, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat and A Christmas Carol (Temple Theatre); Bat Boy and Dream a Little Dream (Actor's Theatre of Charlotte); Love's Labour's Lost, The Tempest, Much Ado About Nothing and Julius Caesar (Charlotte Shakespeare Festival); Floyd Collins (Carolina Actors Studio Theatre); and Rent (Theatre Charlotte). www.chazpofahl.com

Kirsten Wyatt (Tammy Faye Bakker)'s Broadway credits include Annie, A Christmas Story The Musical, Elf, Shrek, Grease, High Fidelity, The Pajama Game, Urinetown and You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown. Favorite regional credits include Sally Bowles in Cabaret, Agnes Gooch in Mame (Connecticut Critics Circle Award), Charity in Sweet Charity, Miss Adelaide in Guys and Dolls, Paulette in Legally Blonde and Ellie Mae Chipley in Show Boat. TV credits include Blue Bloods, The Naked Brothers Band, As the World Turns and All My Children. She is a proud graduate of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Love to Sean, husband of 13 years. Twitter: @KirstenWyatt.

Kurt Boehm (Jimmy Ray) returns to Arena Stage after previously appearing in Fiddler on the Roof, My Fair Lady, Oklahoma! and She Loves Me. Additional D.C. credits include West Side Story, Cabaret, Les Misérables and Kiss of the Spider Woman (Signature Theatre); A Chorus Line, Godspell, How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying and The Producers (Olney Theatre Center); Little Shop of Horrors (Ford's Theatre); The Full Monty (Keegan Theatre); The Last Five Years (Red Branch Theatre); and The Phantom Tollbooth and Latino Inaugural honoring Chita Rivera and Rita Moreno (Kennedy Center). He has nine Helen Hayes Award nominations and holds a B.M. from Catholic University.

**Dyllon Burnside** (Howard/Michael Winans) was seen on Broadway in Holler If Ya Hear Me and Off-Broadway in B-Boy Blues. TV/film credits include Peter Pan Live!, High Maintenance, Prison Break, Central Park and Yinz. Instagram: @dyllonburnside. www.dyllonburnside.com

**Desmond Sean Ellington** (*Carvin Winans/Alvin*)'s theater credits include Dr. Hosea Williams in the musical *I Dream* (Alliance Theatre), *Black Nativity* (Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre), *King: The Opera* (Theatrical Outfit), *MLK: A Monumental Life* and Zuri Craig's *The Perfect Pastor*. He has served as a background vocalist for renowned gospel/R&B recording artists including Micah Stampley, VaShawn Mitchell, Syleena Johnson and Angie Stone. When he isn't on the road with an artist or learning a script for his next role, Desmond enjoys a good book, binging on the latest season of *House of Cards* and spending time with family. He credits his mom, Alesia, as his biggest supporter and greatest ally.

#### Page 4—Arena Stage announces full company of BeBe Winans' Born for This

Gracie Jones (Edith/Ensemble)'s D.C. credits include Code Name: Cynthia (Pallas Theatre Collective); Carousel, The Little Mermaid, Spring Awakening, Cinderella and The Sound of Music (Olney Theatre Center); Beaches and The Threepenny Opera (Signature Theatre); and The Wizard of Oz and Anything Goes (Toby's Dinner Theatre). She received her B.A. in theater from the University of Maryland, College Park. www.grcjones89.wix.com/graciejones

Nick Morrett (Bob) made his Off-Broadway debut originating the role of Laura Lee Handle in Fabulous! The Queen of New Musical Comedies. Regional credits include Spamalot (u/s Galahad/ensemble, Arts Center of Coastal Carolina), Joe Hardy in Damn Yankees (Springer Opera House), Steve in Zanna Don't (Actor's Express), Corny Collins in Hairspray (Atlanta Lyric Theatre), Barfee in The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (Georgia Ensemble Theatre), George in The Drowsy Chaperone (Aurora Theatre) and Conrad Birdie in Bye Bye Birdie (Stage Door Players, 2011 Woodie Award). Love to his parents, family, friends and four-legged son Oliver. Instagram: @NMorrett03.

Milton Craig Nealy (Pop Winans) was most recently seen at Arena Stage in Akeelah and the Bee. Broadway credits include Pop Gordy in Motown The Musical, Bus/Dryer standby in Caroline or Change, John in Miss Saigon (also London and Australian productions), Four-Eyed Moe in Five Guys Named Moe, Andre standby in the Ain't Misbehavin' revival, Agwe in Once on this Island and Dreamgirls (original and revival). National tours include Horse in The Full Monty (also Australian production), Marty in the 2010 Dreamgirls tour and Judas in the 20th anniversary Jesus Christ Superstar tour. Film and TV credits include The Blues Brothers and Person of Interest.

Brad Raymond (Ronald Winans) has performed as an actor, singer or conductor at some of the art world's most esteemed institutions including the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Light Opera Works, Ravinia Festival, Atlanta Opera, Atlanta Lyric Theatre, Kenny Leon's True Colors Theatre, Theater Emory, Horizon Theatre and Spivey Hall. Some of Brad's favorite roles include Homer in Lilies of the Field, Fetch in Fetch Clay, Make Man and his Suzi Bass Award-winning performance as Blue in Chasin' Dem Blues. Be sure to get your DVD copy of the motion picture Joyful Noise to see Brad "bust a move" alongside Queen Latifah and Dolly Parton.

Kiandra Richardson (Whitney Houston)'s favorite credits include Hair and Urinetown (Savannah College of Art and Design) and Chicago (Macon Little Theater). She recently participated in season 15 of American Idol. She has a B.F.A. in performing arts from SCAD: The University for Creative Careers and has trained with James Cromwell, Vincent D'Onofrio and Marvin McIntyre. Kiandra recently worked as the lead female singer for EastCoast Entertainment's MVP band based out of Atlanta, Ga. Facebook/Instagram: @Kiandrasmusic.

Michael Stiggers (Marvin Winans)'s Atlanta credits include A Christmas Carol (Alliance Theatre); Rent (Actor's Express); Les Misérables (Aurora Theatre); Pippin and The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (Legacy Theatre); and Petite Rouge (Synchronicity Theatre). Additional credits include Shrek, The Full Monty, High School Musical and Footloose (Springer Opera House). Michael recently performed with Royal Caribbean Cruise Line Productions.

Nita Whitaker (Mom Winans)'s theater credits include Ragtime, The Ten Commandments and New Brain (Los Angeles), Me & Mrs. Jones (Philadelphia) and Breaking Through (Pasadena Playhouse). TV/film credits include The Winner Is, The Hour of Power, The Bodyguard and Lush Life. After competing for Miss America, Nita was the Star Search grand champion and later toured internationally singing duets with Andrea Bocelli. She sang the original demos of several Whitney Houston standards with David Foster. Nita is also an award-winning author and CEO of a non-profit that presents books and reading fundamentals to children (www.inaworldwithbooks.org). Love to daughters Liisi and Skye LaFontaine and husband Scott Perkins. www.nitawhitaker.com

Alison Whitehurst (Penny)'s theater credits include The Fortress of Solitude (The Public/Dallas Theater Center), Mary Jane Wilkes in Big River (Casa Mañana), Luisa in The Fantasticks (Circle Theatre), April in Company (Jubilee Theatre) and She Loves Me (Stage West). Love and gratitude to God, Gabe, TCU and her whole family for their endless support.

For full company bios please visit arenastage.com/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/born-for-this.

# Page 5-Arena Stage announces full company of BeBe Winans' Born for This

# **Special Events**

#### **Post-Show Conversations**

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff—July 19 following the 7:30 p.m. performance, July 29 following the 2:00 p.m. performance, August 3 following the noon performance and August 18 and 25 following the 8:00 p.m. performances.

#### **Production Information**

Born for This: The BeBe Winans Story
Book by Charles Randolph-Wright and BeBe Winans
Featuring original music and lyrics by BeBe Winans
Directed by Charles Randolph-Wright
World-premiere co-production with the Alliance Theatre
In association with Daniel Chilewich and Todd Gershwin
In the Kreeger Theater | July 1-August 28, 2016

ABOUT: From Charles Randolph-Wright, director of *Motown The Musical*, and six-time Grammy Award-winning icon BeBe Winans comes a heartwarming journey towards self-discovery. Detroit natives BeBe and CeCe Winans, youngest siblings of the Winans family dynasty, experience the ultimate in culture shocks when invited to join Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's television show *Praise the Lord*. The Winans teenagers have the opportunity to become more than just television celebrities, but to integrate TV evangelism. As BeBe and CeCe encounter fame, fortune and even a young Whitney Houston, BeBe must learn to balance his desire for success with his true calling. Combining classic Winans hits with brand-new songs, this inspirational musical features Juan and Deborah Joy Winans in their Arena Stage debuts as BeBe and CeCe Winans.

#### CAST:

Jimmy Ray: Kurt Boehm

Howard/Michael Winans: Dyllon Burnside Carvin Winans/Alvin: Desmond Sean Ellington

Edith/Ensemble: Gracie Jones

**Bob: Nick Morrett** 

Pop Winans: Milton Craig Nealy

Jim Bakker: Chaz Pofahl

Ronald Winans: Brad Raymond

Whitney Houston: Kiandra Richardson Marvin Winans: Michael Stiggers Mom Winans: Nita Whitaker

Penny: Alison Whitehurst

CeCe Winans: Deborah Jov Winans

BeBe Winans: Juan Winans

Tammy Faye Bakker: Kirsten Wyatt Supplemental Extra: Greg Joubert Supplemental Extra: Ronald Woodhead

#### **CREATIVE TEAM:**

Choreographer: Warren Adams Music Supervisor: Donald Lawrence Music Director: Steven Jamail

Set Designer: Neil Patel

Costume Designer: William Ivey Long Lighting Designer: Jason Lyons Sound Designer: Jesse Stevens Projection Designer: John Narun

Copyist: Britt Bonney Stage Manager: Kurt Hall

Assistant Stage Manager: Kristen Mary Harris

# Page 6—Arena Stage announces full company of BeBe Winans' Born for This

#### Plan Your Visit

**TICKETS:** Tickets for *Born for This* are \$50-99, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as pay-your-age tickets, student discounts, family fun packs, Southwest Nights and hero's discounts, visit <u>arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs</u>.

Tickets may be purchased online at <u>arenastage.org</u>, by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.

Sales Office/Subscriptions: 202-488-3300

Group Sales Hotline for 10+ Tickets: 202-488-4380

TTY for deaf patrons: 202-484-0247

Info for patrons with disabilities: 202-488-3300

#### **PERFORMANCE DATES:**

Sunday, Tuesday & Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Friday & Saturday at 8:00 p.m. (except 7/29 at 2:00 p.m.) Saturday & Sunday at 2:00 p.m. Weekday matinee at noon on Wednesday, 8/3

Full calendar: http://tickets.arenastage.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=20919

Open-captioned performances: 8/10 at 7:30 p.m. & 8/18 at 8:00 p.m.

Audio-described performances: 8/13 at 2:00 p.m.

CATWALK CAFÉ: Prix fixe meals are now available at the Catwalk Café and include a choice of soup or salad, main entrée and dessert. Pre-ordered meals are only \$22 (\$25 if purchased that day). To pre-order and see the menu, call 202-488-3300 or visit <a href="mainto:arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-café/">arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-café/</a>. The Catwalk Café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended.

To **pre-order drinks** from the Catwalk Café for up to 50% savings (\$6 house wine and beer), visit tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007.

**METRO:** Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is only one block from the Waterfront-SEU Metro station (Green Line). When exiting the station, walk west on M Street toward Sixth Street, and the main entrance to the Mead Center is on the right.

**PARKING:** Parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage. Subscribers may purchase parking in advance for \$16. Single ticket buyers may purchase parking in advance for \$19 or on the day of the performance for \$22 on a first-come, first-served basis. Limited handicapped parking is available by reservation. Advanced parking must be reserved by calling 202-488-3300. The entrance to the Mead Center garage is on Maine Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets, and the garage closes one hour after the day's last performance ends. Patrons can also park at the Public Parking Garage at 1101 Fourth Street, one block from the Mead Center, for \$11. Street parking is also available along Maine Avenue.

**VALET PARKING:** Arena Stage offers valet service at no additional cost to patrons with accessibility needs who call 202-488-3300 in advance to request valet parking. On days when valet parking is being used for accessibility, it is also available to general patrons one hour prior to show time for \$25, based on availability. To use valet parking, pull up to the main entrance on Sixth Street.

# Page 7—Arena Stage announces full company of BeBe Winans' Born for This

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. Arena Stage produces plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep and dangerous in the American spirit, and presents diverse and ground-breaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Arena Stage is committed to commissioning and developing new plays through the American Voices New Play Institute. Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its seventh decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. arenastage.org

###

#### Connect with us:

Arena Stage app for Apple Arena Stage app for Android

Twitter: @arenastage, follow Born for This with #ArenaBornforThis

Instagram: Instagram.com/arenastage YouTube: youtube.com/arenastage1 Pinterest: pinterest.com/arenastage

Blog: blog.arenastage.org