

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Erica Tucker

press@wacothatercenter.com

WACO THEATER CENTER ANNOUNCES 'Black with a Capital B' – 2022/23 Artistic Season

Programmatic highlights include:

Conductor **Dr. Marcus Norris** and the dynamic **South Side Symphony** chamber ensemble

A world premier theater co-production with **Watts Village Theatre Company** of
Marty and the Hands That Could by **Josh Wilder**

Artist residencies with Epiic Movement creator **Darrell 'Friidom' Dunn** and
Seattle-based choreographer **Jade Solomon Curtis**

A gallery exhibition *Witness* featuring local Black women photographers and image makers in
collaboration with **GOOD MIRRORS** and **Black Women Photographers**

The U.S. premier of a film adaptation of the 1971 Drama Desk award-winning play *Black Terror*
written by **Richard Wesley** and directed by **Richard Lawson**

Los Angeles, CA—Where Art Can Occur (WACO) Theater Center co-founders and artistic directors **Richard and Tina Knowles Lawson** today announced "**Black with a Capital B**" – the 2022/23 artistic program theme for the North Hollywood based theater and gallery exhibition space. On the heels of its fifth year anniversary, the arts and youth mentorship focused organization is making a statement about the heart and soul of its programs by emphasizing its roots in Black culture and the people—artists and collaborators—behind the eclectic, fresh artistic work the company presents and produces year round.

For its fifth year, WACO will present a multidisciplinary program of both performing and visual art experiences by Black artists including a four day run of a new multi-movement chamber ensemble piece performed by **South Side Symphony** composed and directed by Chicago Philharmonic Composer-in-Residence and 2022 UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music graduate **Dr. Marcus Norris**. The performances open on January 16 in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the National Holiday.

"I first had the opportunity to work with WACO in 2017, composing music for a theater production. As the productions got bigger and more musical over the years, eventually South Side Symphony was born. It was a dream I had, and everyone at WACO, including the audience, was energetically supportive of it. I'm immensely grateful because I know art can't occur at this level without the support, care, and artistic freedom I've received from the entire WACO team. Now having another opportunity to collaborate with them, I plan to present a concert even bigger and bolder than the first."

Due to the pandemic the theater has not hosted in-person performances since 2020. In October, the theater hosted its annual fundraiser the Wearable Art Gala and announced its plans to reopen with renewed energy.

"We are thrilled to welcome back patrons to our theater to experience art again—together. This year our season's mantra is 'Black with a Capital B' because we have a vision of curating bold, contemporary programming that evokes tenacity and pride in Black art and, most importantly, celebrates Black art makers." says **Shay Wafer, Executive Director of WACO Theater Center.**

A number of organizational and community partnerships will power the season, including a co-production with longtime theater **Watts Village Theater Company**. Together the two companies will present the world premier of *Marty and the Hands that Could* by national award winning playwright **Josh Wilder**. The play was created and developed for the stage at the **David Geffen Yale School of Drama** in 2018. The project is sponsored in part by an award from the **Los Angeles New Play Project** and will be presented at the **Watts Labor Community Action Committee's Phoenix Hall**.

For visual artists, WACO has partnered with **Black Women Photographers**, an international organization and member database dedicated to Black women and non-binary photographers across the globe. The exhibition, entitled *Witness*, will highlight the work of Los Angeles Black women artists and is co-curated by **Tina Knowles Lawson** and **GOOD MIRRORS** founder **Genel Ambrose**.

"We see a need to elevate the people behind the art and strive to be artist-forward in our presentation of our programming. Too often, Black artists are seen but not heard or their work is seen and they are invisible. We want to flip that dynamic. Our theater is Black with a Capital B and so are the talented artists who have chosen to lend us their work." says **Richard Lawson**.

In addition to main stage performances and gallery exhibition, WACO will host two artists-in-residence—**Darrell "Freedom" Dunn** known for pioneering the cinematic-dance genre called "Epiic", and host the return of Seattle-based choreographer **Jade Solomon Curtis** who's piece *Black Like Me* was developed at WACO in 2019.

Tina Knowles Lawson spoke about the choice to host artists-in-residence, “At WACO, we see ourselves as a home for young Black artists, where they can trust their work will be cultivated through mentorship and celebrated through resources. We are taking that charge literally and are honored to host Friidom and Jade in our theater, giving them time and support to create.”

While in residence, Friidom will present ***B.L.A.Q.K.: The Culture*** (February 17-18), inspired by the work of the classical poet Homer; and Jade Solomon Curtis will present ***Keeper of Sadness*** (May 12-13), a multidisciplinary immersive dance work that integrates innovative VR/AR technology, classical and contemporary dance and activism. Solomon’s work will give voice to the pain that lays dormant in the bellies of so many Black women ignored throughout history.

SELECTED PROGRAMMING FROM WACO THEATER CENTER’S 2022/23 SEASON

South Side Symphony

January 20 at 8 pm

January 21 at 8 pm

January 22 at 6 pm

WACO Theater Center
5144 Lankershim Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 91601

Known for their impressively expansive range of genres including Neo-Soul, R&B, Gospel, Rap, Anime Music, the South Side Symphony Orchestra wants you to know the future is Black. Join conductor Dr. Marcus Norris and the South Side Symphony Orchestra for a trip into their collective vision for the future. Drawing inspiration from their motto “Our Music in Our Time” and the Afro futurism movement, South Side symphony crafts a melodic interrogation into the Black future and invites listeners to give voice to their hopes and dreams for the future of Black folks.

B.L.A.Q.K.: The Culture

February 17 at 7:30 pm

February 18 at 7:30 pm

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5144 Lankershim Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 91601

Friidom is a multidisciplinary movement artist, composer/choreographer, director, and actor; known for pioneering the cinematic-dance genre called “Epiic.” With an Arts Technology degree from The University of Texas at Dallas and currently living in Los Angeles, his mission is to spread movement philosophy & raw expressive street & stage movement creating worlds that bridges divides; a Willy Wonka of movement.

Witness

Opening day and artist reception is March 11 at 6 pm
The exhibition runs for 6-weeks through April 15, with weekend gallery hours.

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What do we witness when we see through the eyes of Black women? How does looking alongside Black women shift our own perspective? What do Black women make possible for us through their own witnessing? *Witness*, will exhibit works from Black femme-identifying artists who project their vision of the world, society, community, and themselves through their art.

Marty and the Hands that Could

Opening day and artist reception is April 28 at 8 pm
The production runs for 3-weeks through May 21, with performances Thursday-Sunday.

Phoenix Hall, Watts Labor Community Action Committee

Released from prison on the eve of his 25th birthday, Marty returns home to his family, equipped with a handwritten manuscript and big dreams to turn his life around. But his cousin Junior has also come home with problems of his own, setting them on a collision course as they struggle to break free of the curse that has haunted their family for generations. Can Marty put his hands to good use, or is his fate already written? This production will center the need for Black healing from generational traumas. WACO Theater presents the world premiere of *Marty The Hands that Could* by award-winning playwright Josh Wilder in collaboration with Watts Village Theatre Company.

Black Terror

June 16
June 17
June 18
June 19

WACO Theater Center
5144 Lankershim Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 91601

Originally produced fifty years ago, playwright and screenwriter Richard Wesley's *Black Terror* returns as a film adaptation under the bold direction of Richard Lawson. This film collaboration illuminates the urgent demands and extreme sacrifices at the center of Black liberation struggles. In *Black Terror*, an impassioned squad of revolutionaries called the Black Comrades sets out to unshackle their people from oppression. The freedom fighters' divergent approaches not only threaten their alliance but expose their vulnerabilities. Lawson and Wesley's production, which extends beyond any one time or place, challenges audiences to consider: What path

toward freedom would you take? *Black Terror* is a co-production with Newark Symphony Hall and will be available for on-demand streaming Summer 2023.

TICKETS

Tickets for WACO Theater Center's 2022-2023 season will be available online at:

www.wacothatercenter.com

ABOUT WACO THEATER CENTER

WACO Theater Center is a performing and visual arts organization dedicated to the empowerment of Los Angeles artists, young people and stories of the African diaspora.

Founded in 2016, WACO opened its doors to the public in 2017. Located in the heart of North Hollywood's Arts District, the state-of-the-art complex includes a 99-seat theater, an art gallery space and is the home of Richard Lawson Studios. Over its five year history, WACO has invested in more than 700 artists and 1000 young people in Los Angeles and beyond. WACO's mentorship program Tina's Angels and Richard's Warriors, exposes inner-city youth to the world of the arts and opportunities beyond their zip code. Each year participants are provided computers, attend workshops like etiquette class, and field trips to create first time experiences. WACO is committed to providing a creative center where art can occur and give artists and youth a place to grow their talent and celebrate their artistry.

WACO Theater Center is a registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization.

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SUPPORT

Supporters of the 2022-2023 programs include: Amazon's Black Business Accelerator, Amazon Music, City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Ebony & Jet, Fund II Foundation, Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture, Mielle Organics, PRG and SheaMoisture.

PRESS INQUIRIES

Press and media, please apply for event credentials via email to **Erica Tucker** at

press@wacothatercenter.com

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