

**TYLER PERRY – THE TRAILBLAZER AWARD
WACO THEATER CENTER, 2019**

On Saturday, June 1, 2019, actor, playwright and filmmaker Tyler Perry will receive The Trailblazer Award at WACO Theater Center's Wearable Art Gala in Los Angeles. Perry's inspirational journey from the hard streets of New Orleans to the heights of Hollywood's A-list is the stuff of American legend. Born into poverty and raised in a household scarred by abuse, Perry fought from a young age to find the strength, faith and perseverance that would later form the foundations of his much-acclaimed plays, films, books and shows.

It was a simple piece of advice from Oprah Winfrey that set Perry's career in motion. Encouraged to keep a diary of his daily thoughts and experiences, he began writing a series of soul-searching letters to himself. The letters, full of pain and in time, forgiveness, became a healing catharsis. His writing inspired a musical, *I Know I've Been Changed*, and in 1992, Perry gathered his life's savings in hopes of staging it for sold out crowds. He spent all the money but the people never came, and Perry once again came face to face with the poverty that had plagued his youth. He spent months sleeping in seedy motels and his car but his faith - in God and, in turn, himself - only got stronger. He forged a powerful relationship with the church, and kept writing. In 1998 his perseverance paid off and a promoter booked *I Know I've Been Changed* for a limited run at a local church-turned-theatre. This time, the community came out in droves, and soon the musical moved to Atlanta's prestigious Fox Theatre. Tyler Perry never looked back.

And so began an incredible run of 13 plays in as many years, including *Woman Thou Art Loosed!*, a celebrated collaboration with the prominent Dallas pastor T.D. Jakes. In the year 2000, *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* marked the first appearance of the now-legendary Madea. The God-fearing, gun-toting, pot-smoking, loud-mouthed grandmother, Madea, was played by Perry himself. Madea was such a resounding success, she soon spawned a series of plays - *Madea's Family Reunion* (2002), *Madea's Class Reunion* (2003), *Madea Goes To Jail* (2005) - and set the stage for Perry's jump to the big screen. In 2015 Perry returned to the stage, performing his new original play, *Madea on the Run*, to sold out audiences across the United States.

In early 2005, Perry's first feature film, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, debuted at number one nationwide. His ensuing films, *Madea's Family Reunion*, *Daddy's Little Girls*, *Why Did I Get Married?*, *Meet The Browns*, *The Family That Preys*, *I Can Do Bad All by Myself*, *Why Did I Get Married Too?*, *For Colored Girls*, *Madea's Big, Happy Family*, *Good Deeds* and *Madea's Witness Protection* have all been met with massive commercial success, delighting audiences across America and around the world. He also starred in the Rob Cohen directed *Alex Cross* and helped release Academy Award-nominated *Precious*, a movie based on the novel *Push* by Sapphire, in conjunction with his 34th Street Films banner, Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Films and Lionsgate.

2006 saw the publication of Perry's first book, *Don't Make A Black Woman Take Off Her Earrings: Madea's Uninhibited Commentaries On Life And Love*, which shot to the top of the New York Times nonfiction bestseller list and remained there for eight weeks. It went on to claim Quill Book Awards for

both "Humor" and "Book of the Year" (an unheard-of feat for a first-time author), and spread Tyler Perry's unique brand of inspirational entertainment to a devoted new audience. It is a brand that quickly became an empire. In 2007, Perry expanded his reach to television with the TBS series *House of Payne*, the highest-rated first-run syndicated cable show of all time, which went into syndication after only a year. His follow up effort, *Meet the Browns*, was the second highest debut ever on cable - after *House of Payne*. In late 2012, Perry teamed up with Oprah Winfrey in an exclusive deal to bring scripted programming to her cable network, OWN, and launched with the half hour sitcom, *Love Thy Neighbor*, and the hour-long drama, *The Haves and The Have Nots*, which made its debut in 2013 and has continued to break ratings on the network. This past summer, Perry debuted a new drama series called *Too Close to Home* on TLC, the network's first scripted series. OWN recently premiered a *House of Payne* spinoff series, *The Paynes*, on the network in 2018. It was announced in July 2017 that Perry signed a multi-year content partnership with Viacom, in which he will produce original drama and comedy series across the Viacom networks, in addition to having a first-look feature film deal with Paramount Pictures group.

In the fall of 2008, Perry opened his 200,000 square foot Studio in Atlanta, situated on the former Delta Airlines campus in the Greenbriar area of southwest Atlanta. During the course of its operation, the space was home to production of over 15 films and over 800 episodes of Perry's five television series. In 2015, TPS announced plans to expand operations with the acquisition of Fort McPherson, which sits on over 330 acres. Perry and the studio's Atlanta-based employees will remain in production of Perry's five current television series, in addition to major feature films and television shows filming in Atlanta. Production is already underway at the new studio, which will contain twelve soundstages ranging in size between 10,000 and 60,000 square feet.

Not one to rest on success, Tyler Perry and his Atlanta-based employees have been hard at work. His films include *Temptation: Confessions of a Marriage Counselor*, released in March 2013 and his 34th Street Films banner, *Peeples*, released in May 2013. In late 2013, Perry starred in *A Madea Christmas*, adapted from his stage play by the same name. In 2014 he was seen in 34th Street Film's production that he also directed, *Single Mom's Club*. A show for OWN entitled *If Loving You Is Wrong*, based on the film, premiered in 2014. That year, Perry also garnered rave reviews for his role opposite Ben Affleck in David Fincher's critically acclaimed box office hit, *Gone Girl*. He was also seen on the big screen in 2016 for Paramount's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of The Shadows* as the villain "Baxter Stockman."

In 2016, Perry reprised the role of "Madea" in Lionsgate's smash-hit *Boo! A Madea Halloween*, which spent two weeks at number one on the US box office. The sequel to the film was released in October 2017 and took top spot at the box office on opening weekend. Never one to rest, in 2018 Perry also released *Acrimony* starring Taraji P. Henson with Lionsgate, and *Nobody's Fool* starring Tiffany Haddish, Tika Sumpter, and Whoopi Goldberg with Paramount. On the silver screen, Perry most recently can be seen on Adam McKay's Oscar-nominated film, *VICE*, about Dick Cheney, where he portrays "Colin Powell". In March 2019, Perry also his newest movie with Lionsgate, *A Madea Family Funeral*, which brought his popular character back to the big screen for her final moment.

But listen to Tyler Perry and you'll hear a man who hasn't forgotten about the people that have helped him reach the top of a mountain he could once only dream of climbing. He has been intimately involved and donated generously to civil rights causes through work with the NAACP and NAN. He also strongly supports charities that focus on helping the homeless, such as Global Medical Relief Fund, Charity Water, Feeding America, Covenant House, Hosea Feed the Hungry, Project Adventure, and Perry Place - a 20-home community that Perry built for survivors of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. In January 2010, Perry pledged \$1,000,000 via The Tyler Perry Foundation to help rebuild the lives of those affected by the earthquakes in Haiti.

Tyler Perry practices what he preaches, and what he preaches has endeared him to millions of fans drawn by that unique blend of spiritual hope and down-home humor that continues to shape his inspiring life story and extraordinary body of work.

WACO Theater Center is proud to present Tyler Perry with its inaugural Trailblazer Award at the 2019 Wearable Art Gala on Saturday, June 1 in Los Angeles. For more information, visit www.wacothatercenter.com.