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**Ford's Theatre Society Announces World-Premiere Musical
To Premiere at Historic Ford's Theatre in Spring 2022**



**A heartfelt and hopeful celebration of Black food, family and tradition by
American composer Nolan Williams Jr.**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Grace*, an electrifying musical celebrating the perseverance of family and the power of tradition by acclaimed American composer Nolan Williams Jr., will make its world premiere at the historic Ford's Theatre in Washington in spring 2022, directed and choreographed by Robert Barry Fleming. Ticket on-sale dates will be announced by Ford's Theatre at a future date.

Packed with an eclectic mix of styles including Jazz, R&B, rousing up-tempos and raise-the-roof ballads, *Grace* is a musical feast examining the little-told history of African-American culinary tradition and the challenges faced by Black-owned businesses. The musical captures a day in the life of the Mintons, a Philadelphia family who gather to mourn the loss of their matriarch and deal with the future of their family restaurant in a changing neighborhood.

With memorable titles such as "Three Okra Seeds" and "Potlikker," every song holds a story to savor. The show's finale, "[When Gran'Me Cooked](#)," the first song from the musical to be released, honors the historic role women have in gathering families and communities alike.

Grace is produced by special arrangement with Dale A. Mott and his company, Edgewood, which co-produced for Broadway *Lifespan of a Fact* and the upcoming *Thoughts of a Colored Man*.

"This is truly the fulfillment of a dream, to craft this American musical and to have it performed in my hometown on one of America's great stages," said **Williams**, who grew up attending shows and performing at D.C.'s regional theatres. "Ford's Theatre has a history of launching

momentous shows to Broadway, and we hope someday to be among them. We are thrilled to partner with Ford's to welcome everyone to a seat at our table to experience *Grace*."

"We are delighted to present this exciting musical by D.C.-based composer Nolan Williams Jr. and a creative team of Black artists in the spring of 2022," said **Ford's Theatre Director Paul R. Tetreault**. "Ford's Theatre has been the birthplace of more than 35 world-premiere plays and musicals since our 1968 reopening. We're especially eager for audiences to come together and experience this joyful music and story of resilience, remembrance and the food that ties us to community."

Journey to the Stage

The announcement of a world-premiere production for *Grace* marks the culmination of a years-long journey that was briefly curtailed by the COVID pandemic. The musical was originally performed in 2016 during the 53rd Grand Boule of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, the nation's largest Greek-letter fraternity founded by African American men. It followed with workshop residencies at Cleveland Play House's New Ground Theatre Festival in 2017 and 2018 and Actor's Theatre of Louisville, Ky., in 2020. *Grace* was an official selection for the 44th Annual Humana Festival of New American Plays but was canceled just before the scheduled opening because of COVID.

Williams drew inspiration for *Grace* after conducting extensive research on African American culinary history, including the pioneers chronicled in W.E.B. DuBois' seminal work *The Philadelphia Negro*.

"The rich imagery of food born of our hardship and turned into culinary genius by pioneering Black chefs and caterers such as Bogle, Augustin, Prosser, Dorsey, Jones and Minton spoke to me. I heard these giants' voices and was inspired to imbue their legacies into *Grace*," Williams said.

Williams, a Cultural Curator

Williams has dedicated his professional career to the curation of works that illuminate issues of civil rights, social justice and cultural curiosities. His extensive body of creative work includes directing and producing the television special *Becoming Douglass Commonwealth*, and musical stage productions including *Stirring the Waters Across America* at The Kennedy Center, *Go, Tell It!* at Lincoln Theatre, and *Devine Hamer Gray* (in development).

Williams' choral and orchestral works have been premiered by major American orchestras, and he has garnered songwriting credits on two Grammy-nominated projects. Williams also has produced arts and educational programming through his [NEWorks Productions](#) in partnership with The Kennedy Center and Philadelphia's Mann Center; and developed cultural programming with the Smithsonian, U.S. State Department and the Embassies of India, France and South Africa. He is one of The Kennedy Center's inaugural Social Practice Residents.

Grace Ambassadors

Hospitality and entertainment mogul **Sheila C. Johnson**, a Ford's Theatre Lincoln Medalist, and celebrated chef and TV personality **Carla Hall** have joined *Grace* as hospitality and culinary ambassadors, respectively, as the themes Williams visits in the musical resonate with them personally and professionally.

"I've been taken in not only by Williams' gorgeous music but by the story of the food pioneers and entrepreneurs—especially the women—at the center of *Grace*," **Johnson said**. "As an African American businesswoman in the hospitality field, I understand the challenges women of color face, not only in the past, but today. It is my pleasure to serve as an ambassador for this new American masterpiece, which explores the powerful legacy of African American cooking in changing times."

"I have always felt a deep responsibility to teach and inspire people who look to me for recipes and culinary knowledge," **Hall said**. "Being an ambassador for *Grace* allows me to fulfill my duty to honor our food culture and history while moving our community forward through the power of storytelling."

For more on *Grace*, visit www.gracethemusical.com and www.fords.org. Follow @Grace.themusical on Instagram, @gracethemusical on Twitter and @gracethemusical on Facebook using #GraceTheMusical.

Ford's Theatre

One of the most visited sites in the nation's capital, Ford's Theatre reopened its doors in 1968, more than a hundred years after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Operated through a partnership between Ford's Theatre Society and the National Park Service, Ford's Theatre is the premier destination in the nation's capital to explore and celebrate Abraham Lincoln's life and legacy.

Ford's Theatre Society was founded under the guidance of executive producer Frankie Hewitt, who, during her 35-year tenure, established Ford's as a living, working theatre producing performances that highlighted the diversity of the American experience. Since the arrival of Paul R. Tetreault as Director, critics and the theatre-going public have recognized Ford's for the superior quality of its artistic programming. With works from the Tony-nominated *Come From Away* and the nationally acclaimed *Big River*, to the world premieres of *Meet John Doe*, *The Heavens Are Hung In Black*, *Liberty Smith*, *Necessary Sacrifices*, *The Widow Lincoln* and *The Guard*, Ford's Theatre is making its mark on the American theatre landscape. Under the current leadership of Board of Trustees Chairman Phebe N. Novakovic and through the lens of Lincoln's leadership and legacy, Ford's today endeavors to advance Lincoln's "unfinished work" with programs and performances that cultivate empathy, encourage dialogue and bridge divides in American life.

For more information on Ford's Theatre, please visit www.fords.org. Ford's Theatre on Twitter and Instagram: @FordsTheatre. Ford's Theatre on Facebook: www.facebook.com/fordstheatre.

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PHOTOS: Photos of Nolan Williams Jr., Williams with Grace ambassadors Sheila Johnson and Carla Hall, and the Grace logo are available for use with permission at this [DropBox link](#).

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