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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***Blackberry Daze***  
**Soulful, Suspenseful, Emotional:**  
**A Musical Mystery-Romance in the Key of the Blues!**  
**July 14-August 27, 2017**

ATLANTA – **After a successful world premiere at MetroStage in Washington D.C., the exciting and bluesy new musical *Blackberry Daze* whirls onto Horizon’s stage in Atlanta this summer beginning July 14<sup>th</sup>.** Nominated for a Helen Hayes award for the most outstanding adaptation of a play or musical, **Thomas W. Jones II returns for his 13<sup>th</sup> season** to direct this compelling and romantic journey to the heart of the south. A whirlwind whodunit of family secrets and passions, *Blackberry Daze* inspires with original blues, jazz and gospel music by William Knowles. Adapted from Ruth P. Watson’s 2012 novel *Blackberry Days of Summer*, **don’t miss this musical mystery-romance in the key of the blues!**

It is the end of The Great War, and a small Virginia town is rocked by secrets and seduction as Herman Camm, a provocative gambler (played by TC Carson of *Living Single* fame), weaves his magic on the lives of three unsuspecting women, Mae Lou and her daughter Carrie, and Pearl, a blues singer at the local juke joint. **Award-winning writer/director Thomas W. Jones II is back with his musical adaptation of the novel *Blackberry Days of Summer*** in this emotionally charged stage musical with unforgettable stories of love, hope, survival, and redemption.

Performances are Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays at 8pm, Saturdays at 3pm and 8:30pm and Sundays at 5pm at Horizon Theatre in Little Five Points/Inman Park (1083 Austin Avenue NE Atlanta, GA 30307) through August 27. Tickets start at \$25 and are available at [www.horizontheatre.com](http://www.horizontheatre.com) or 404-584-7450. The play is made possible in part by production sponsorship from **Macy’s**.

**The Story: *Blackberry Daze***

The play starts with one gunshot. Five people are all willing to pull the trigger on gambling womanizer Herman Camm—but whodunit? **Herman Camm is the beady-eyed, sharply-dressed man introducing himself to the mourning family as their loved one’s body is being lowered into the grave.** Far from trustworthy, he is the type of man who is “cockle-doodle-doodling in a whole lot of hen houses,” according to Aunt Ginny. He courts matronly Mae Lou immediately following her husband’s death because he wants a woman to take care of him, but he is already involved with the local juke joint singer Pearl because she satisfies... well, other needs. In the

wake of his shenanigans, he sets three more aflame as they grapple with his dangerous presence: Pearl's cuckolded husband, Willie, a soldier who has just returned from the war; Mae Lou's college-bound teen-age daughter, Carrie; and Simon, the budding baseball player who Carrie is falling for. Herman is a charismatic ladies man, but he's plagued by a dark past. When he smells of corn liquor, he's a loaded gun, and young Carrie is an easy target. "It's no wonder so many people wanted him dead," a character says during the show's high energy opening number, as the list of suspects grows with each of Herman's grins and sly looks.

**Whisking us from juke joint to city club to the rural Virginia farm, the bluesy music, high stepping dance and story-telling style** of the play keeps the action fast as actors change characters and locations with a quick turn. With Jones' signature highly choreographed direction, the nimble ensemble never stops moving in creating this high-stakes tale. "I was writing about something I thought could have happened in 1919," explains co-adaptor Ruth Watson. "But it could be today's story, anywhere. It's amazing how things have and haven't changed in the human heart."

### Playwright and Director

**Artistic Associate Thomas W. Jones II returns to direct his thirteenth production at Horizon, his own adaption of Ruth Watson's novel *Blackberry Days of Summer*.** Jones has directed, written, and performed in more than 150 plays worldwide including Horizon favorites such as *'da Kink in My Hair, Uprising, every tongue confess, Right On, The Bluest Eye, and Shakin' the Mess Outta Misery* (Suzi Award for Best Play). Tom was the co-founder of Jomandi Productions in Atlanta, the third largest African-American theatre in the US, which he helmed for two decades. As a writer, director, and actor, his work has received acclaim nationally and internationally, including Helen Hayes Awards, New York Audelco Awards, Dramalogue Award, San Diego Critics Award, and the NAACP Phoenix Award. He works regularly in NYC and regionally and has ongoing relationships with theatres in Minneapolis, Washington D.C., and Phoenix, among others. In 2015, Tom directed the play whose real-life rehearsals and performance were televised on the Bravo series *Real Housewives of Atlanta* and was featured on the show as the director.

Ruth P. Watson is the other key player in the adaption of *Blackberry Daze*, based on her first book. Watson grew up at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, in Lynchburg, Virginia. Although her work took her to Atlanta, where she currently lives with her family, she set the story in the Old Dominion and in Washington D.C. with the rural location providing much of the ambiance. **Watson said the stories she heard growing up in rural Virginia put a "definite spin" on the book, giving it "the color and flow of Virginia."** *Blackberry Days of Summer* was Watson's first success as an author. "I had to wrap my mind about how this could be a musical," she explained. "But once I thought about it I realized that **through the music, people are going to be able to experience the characters, to feel the emotions.**"

After completing her graduate work at Central Michigan University, she was a recipient of the Caversham Fellowship, an artist and writer's residency in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, where she published her first children's book in Zulu, *Our Secret Bond*. She has written for *Upscale, Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and other publications.

**The original and evocative music by William Knowles underscores the dialogue and each of the character's personal style.** William Knowles studied jazz at Howard University and went on to receive his Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of Massachusetts. During the past twenty years Mr. Knowles has amassed credits as a composer, arranger, musical director and pianist for many shows at regional theaters around the country, including Dallas Theater Center, Philadelphia Theatre Company, Arena Stage, Northlight (Chicago), CenterStage (Baltimore), Indiana Repertory Theater, and the Milwaukee Repertory Theater, where he has performed in eight different productions. Knowles is a mainstay at MetroStage, where *Blackberry Daze* originally premiered, having music directed *Bessie's Blues*, *Gee's Bend* (Helen Hayes Nomination), *Bricktop*, *His Eye is on the Sparrow*, *All Night Strut*, *Ella Fitzgerald: First Lady of Song*, and *Cool Papa's Party* (Helen Hayes Award).

Suzi Award-winning **Musical Director S. Renee Clark** returns after her recent Horizon triumphs – *The Toxic Avenger* and *Avenue Q* both at Horizon and in Piedmont Park, and more recently the sell-out success *'da Kink in my Hair*. She continues a creative collaboration with director Tom Jones that is more than twenty years in the making, including recent work together on *'da Kink in my Hair*, *Uprising*, *Right On* and *Sheddin'* at Horizon. Here she weaves the story together through a score that ranges from R&B to gospel to African drumming and beyond.

### **Cast and Designers**

Leading the cast of talented actors is the ever-popular **TC Carson**, returning to his role after the world premiere at MetroStage in D.C., as the womanizing smooth-talking Herman Camm. Carson returns to Horizon after being last seen in the R&B musical *Two Queens, One Castle* in 2004, and is best known for portraying Kyle Barker on the FOX sitcom *Living Single*. He is also known as the voice of Mace Windu on *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, and of Kratos in the *God of War* video game series.

Sharing the stage with him is a diverse ensemble of all-star actors based in both Atlanta and DC. **Ayana Reed** is Carrie, the young teen valiantly struggling to find her way through life. Reed, like Carson, is reviving her role from the D.C. premiere. As fate would have it, joining Reed is long-time best friend, **Brittany Inge** (*Father Comes Home From the Wars* at Actor's Express), as the bluesy nightclub singer Pearl. **Naomi Lavette** (Synchronicity, Horizon Theatre, Aurora Theatre, Alliance Theatre, and True Colors Theatre) graces our stage once again as Mae Lou, Carrie's mother and Camm's wife. Lavette is a Suzi Bass Award winner (Best Ensemble) and nominee (Best Featured Actress) for her dynamic performance as Ms. Lamama in *Shakin the Mess Outta Misery* here at Horizon in 2010. **Christy Clark** (*Cowgirls* at Horizon) and **Christian Magby** (*In the Heights* at Aurora) who are both Savannah College of Art and Design graduates, round out the cast sharing their dynamic acting abilities toggling between multiple roles to propel this story.

The multiple Suzi Award winning set designers **Moriah and Isabel Curley-Clay** will create a storytelling space that goes from rural Virginia to a local juke joint and beyond. Costume designer **Nyrobi Moss** (Suzi Award winner) creates the diverse ensemble of characters from the Great War era. After fleshing out an entire kitchen in *How to Use a Knife*, **Kathryn Muse** (props assistant at the Alliance Theatre) returns designing props. As the only designer from the original production of *Blackberry Daze* in D.C., **Robby Hayes** (*Uprising* at Horizon) returns to design projections. **Andre Allen** (*Memphis* and *The Mountaintop*, Aurora Theatre) will be helming the

lighting design, while **Mike Salvatoriello** (*Black Nativity* at Southwest Arts Center) designs and mixes the sound.

### **Tickets and More**

*Blackberry Daze* runs July 14th through August 27<sup>th</sup>. Performances are Wed, Thurs and Fri at 8 PM, Saturday at 3 PM and 8:30 PM and Sunday at 5 PM at the Horizon Theatre in Little Five Points/Inman Park. (1083 Austin Avenue NE, Atlanta, GA 30307, corner of Euclid and Austin Avenues). There is no Sat matinee July 15<sup>th</sup>.

Tickets start as low as \$25 and are on sale now. Prices change based on availability and demand, so buy early for the best prices! Group tickets available for \$3 off for 10-24 and \$5 off for 25+. Tickets and information are available at or 404-584-7450 or [www.horizontheatre.com](http://www.horizontheatre.com).

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## **THE SUMMARY**

### **Blackberry Daze**

It is the end of The Great War, and a small Virginia town is rocked by secrets and seduction as Herman Camm, a provocative gambler, weaves his magic on the lives of three unsuspecting women, Mae Lou and her daughter Carrie, and Pearl, a blues singer at the local juke joint. **Award-winning writer/director Thomas W. Jones II is back with his musical adaptation of the novel *Blackberry Days of Summer*. Don't miss this musical mystery-romance in the key of blues.**

#### Length & Content

*Blackberry Daze* runs about 90 minutes and includes a 15 minute intermission

Contains adult themes

## **SPONSORED BY MACY'S**

### **PLAYWRIGHTS**

Ruth P. Watson & Thomas W. Jones II  
Original Music by William Knowles

### **DIRECTORS**

Director - Thomas W. Jones II  
Musical Director – S. Renee Clark

### **CAST**

Carrie- Ayana Reed  
Herman Camm- TC Carson\*  
Mae Lou- Naomi Lavette\*  
Pearl- Brittany Inge  
Willie/Simon- Christian Magby

Ginny/Annie May/Hester- Christy Clark

\*Member of Actors Equity Association

### **CREATIVE TEAM**

Scenic Designers - Isabel and Moriah Curley-Clay

Costume Designer- Nyrobi Moss

Props Designer – Kathryn Muse

Lighting Designer – Andre Allen

Sound Designer – Mike Salvatoriello

Stage Manager – lark hackshaw

Stage Manager – Lisa Watson

Projections – Robby Hayes

**Dates: July 14-August 27, 2017**

**Days and Times:** Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 8 PM, Saturday at 3 PM and 8:30 PM, and Sunday at 5 PM. No Sat matinee July 15th

**Prices:** Tickets start at \$25. Discounts can be given for groups of 10 or more. Prices change based on availability and demand, so buy early for the best prices. Internet convenience fee added to all online orders. No refunds, exchanges allowed with 24 hours notice.

**Tickets and info:** [www.horizontheatre.com](http://www.horizontheatre.com) or 404-584-7450.

### **Press Photos**

Press photos are available at:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/horizontheatre/sets/72157685417078485>

### **About Horizon Theatre Company**

Horizon Theatre Company connects people, inspires hope and promotes positive change through the stories of our times. We produce professional area and world premieres of smart, funny and provocative contemporary plays. We also develop the next generation of diverse artists and audiences. For more information about tickets, group sales, or to receive a season brochure, call 404.584.7450 or visit horizontheatre.com.

Major funding is provided by the City of Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, the Fulton County Board of Commissioners, the Metropolitan Atlanta Arts Fund, and The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta. This program is supported in part by the Georgia Council for the Arts through the appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly. GCA also receives support from its partner agency- the National Endowment for the Arts. We are grateful for our play and program corporate sponsors: Macy's and the Turner voices initiative of Turner Broadcasting.



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