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**WEST COAST PREMIERE of
The Wallis' Production of
WITNESS UGANDA
A DOCUMENTARY MUSICAL
by Matt Gould and Griffin Matthews
Directed by Griffin Matthews**

**Produced In Association with
Leslie Odom, Jr. & Nicolette Robinson, Cynthia Erivo & Luran Bromley,
Abigail Spencer, Hasan & Jania Askari, Neil & Kate Malik, Lisa Delima and
James & Michelle Toney**

**Starring Twelve-Time Grammy Nominee Ledisi, Jamar Williams,
Amber Iman and Emma Hunton in Groundbreaking Production
Documenting the Story of a Man Battling to Find his Place
in a World Full of Injustice and Inhumanity**

**Wednesday, February 6 – Saturday, February 23, 2019, at the
Wallis Annenberg Center for Performing Arts**

(Beverly Hills, CA February 8, 2019) — The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts presents the West Coast premiere of The Wallis' production of ***WITNESS UGANDA***, a groundbreaking documentary musical by Matt Gould and Griffin Matthews starring twelve-time Grammy nominee Ledisi, Jamar Williams (*Wild Goose Dreams*), Amber Iman (*Hamilton*) and Emma Hunton (*Wicked*), directed by Matthews with music direction by Gould, from Tuesday, February 5 – Saturday, February 23, 2019, in The Wallis's Lovelace Studio Theater. *Witness Uganda* is produced in association with Leslie Odom, Jr., Nicolette Robinson, Cynthia Erivo, Abigail Spencer, Luran Bromley, Hasan & Jania Askari and Neil & Kate Malik. After a successful Off-Broadway run, this new and revised production documents the story of a man battling


to find his place in a world full of injustice and inhumanity.

In addition to Ledisi (Rain Lady/Church Lady), Jamar Williams (Griffin), Amber Iman (Joy) and Emma Hunton (Ryan), the cast features Kameron Richardson (Jacob), Naārai (Grace), Sha'leah Nikole (Eden), Dexter Darden (Ibrahim), Jordan Barrow (Ronny), Jai'Len Josey (Vocalist/Understudy for Rain Lady/Church Lady) and Antwone Barnes, Kennan D Washington and Thurzday in the Ensemble. Ledisi will not perform on the evening of Friday, February 15 and for both shows on Sunday, February 17. In her absence, Jai'Len Josey will play the roles of Rain Lady/Church Lady. *Witness Uganda* is choreographed by Abdur-Rahim Jackson, with music supervision by Remy Kurs, set design by Connor MacPhee, lighting design by David Hernandez, costumes by Carlton Jones and sound design by Martin Carillo. Assistant Director is Mark Jacob Chaitin and Stage Manager is Sara Sahin. Casting is by Chad Murnane of Binder Casting.

Based on a true story, *Witness Uganda* follows Griffin, a New York City-based American volunteer, as he arrives in Uganda to help build a village school and escape his church's condemnation of his sexuality. When he falls into a complicated relationship with a group of destitute, orphaned teenagers, he finds himself driven by a mission that will change his and their lives forever. From the rolling hills of the Ugandan countryside to a stifling apartment in New York City, from a joyous celebration of African youth to a terrifying abduction 8,000 miles away, *Witness Uganda* explores the question, "is changing the world even possible?"

According to CBS, *Witness Uganda* is, "an awesomely powerful musical that will thrill you to the bones." Associated Press called it, "a vibrant, pulsating musical," and TimeOut NY described it as, "exuberant and soulful... releases gale-force waves of faith, hope and love." The show has received the Richard Rodgers Award, Harold Adamson Award and Dean Kay Award.

Witness Uganda has been performed in concert by Gould and Matthews around the country and around the world since 2008. It had its world premiere at Harvard University's American Repertory Theater in 2014 and premiered off-Broadway at New York City's Second Stage Theater under the name *Invisible Thread*, both under the direction of Tony winner Diane Paulus. *Witness Uganda* has helped to raise over \$275,000 for UgandaProject, an organization founded by Matthews and co-directed by Gould that sponsors the education of a group of students living in



Kampala, Uganda. Both Matthews and Gould have each spent time living and working in Africa. Gould was a Peace Corps volunteer in The Islamic Republic of Mauritania from 2001 to 2003, and Griffin first went to Uganda in 2005 on an aid trip. For more than a decade since, the two have visited Uganda. They created *Witness Uganda* based on interviews with UgandaProject staff and students, weaving music through the words of the people.

"This production gets back to the roots of *Witness Uganda*," says Gould, and Matthews adds, "We're excited to share this raw, real story about the complexity of helping others. It feels more relevant now than ever."

"From the beginning of my association with Matt and Griffin and this show, I have always connected with their story of this young man on his epic journey," says The Wallis' artistic director Paul Crewes. "It's been a wonderful experience to work with them at The Wallis on this West Coast premiere."

Tickets, \$50, are on sale now and, available at TheWallis.org/Witness. The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts is located at [9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills](https://www.google.com/maps/place/9390+N+Santa+Monica+Boulevard,+Beverly+Hills,+CA+90210/@34.067111,-118.401111,15z). To purchase tickets and for more information, please call 310-746-4000 or visit: TheWallis.org/Witness.

About the Artists:

MATT GOULD (Co-Writer, Music Director) is a recipient of the Richard Rodgers Award (2012 and 2014), The Jonathan Larson Award, and ASCAP's Dean Kay, Harold Adamson, and Richard Rodgers Awards. His musical *Lempicka* had its world premiere at Williamstown Theater Festival in 2018 and is aiming for a New York run in 2020. Upcoming original works include *The Family Project* and *Drive Change*, a musical that centers on the justice system in the US. He wrote *Twilight in Manhego* (directed by Tony winner Billy Porter) for the NYMF, has written and arranged music for Playwrights Horizons and translated, adapted and directed *Romeo and Juliet in Pulaar* (Mauritania, West Africa.) Gould has performed around the world including Uganda, Mauritania, and Japan, and across the US. A graduate of Boston University's College of Fine Arts, he is a frequent speaker and guest lecturer at schools and Universities. He is co-director of UgandaProject.

GRIFFIN MATTHEWS (Co-Writer, Director) graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in his hometown of Pittsburgh, PA. He co-wrote and starred Off-Broadway in *Invisible Thread (aka Witness Uganda)* at Second Stage as well as the American Repertory Theater in Boston, MA and won the Richard Rodgers, Dean Kay, and Harold Adamson Awards. He's directed several readings of *Lempicka* for Yale Rep, New Dramatists, and NAMT and associate directed and choreographed

alongside John Caird at Vassar College, Lincoln Center, Warner Theater in DC, Uganda, and in Tokyo. He directed Tony winner Leslie Odum Jr's debut concert for his residency at the McKittrick Hotel in NYC. *The Family Project*", which Griffin co-wrote alongside Matt Gould, is their newest documentary musical about the ever-changing face of the American family with a same-sex couple at the center. As an actor, Griffin has joined the cast of *Dear White People* on Netflix for Season 3. *Witness Uganda* is based on his organization [UgandaProject](#), which he founded in 2005.

LEDISI (Rain Lady/Church Lady) is a twelve-time Grammy-nominated vocal powerhouse who has wowed fans ever since she came onto the scene. She's earned a place in the pantheon of the best soul singers of her generation. Ledisi is a favorite of the Obamas and has performed eight times at the White House. Her fans include icons, legends and current chart-toppers such as Prince, Patti LaBelle, Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder, and more. She has headlined two national sold-out tours, performed alongside Richie Sambora, Dave Matthews, Kelly Clarkson, Jill Scott, Maxwell, and many more. She's appeared on nationally recognized shows like "Good Morning America," "HARRY," "The David Letterman Show," "The Late Night with Jimmy Fallon," and VH-1's "Diva's Live," to name a few. In 2015, she appeared in the Oscar-nominated movie *Selma* as Mahalia Jackson and is currently starring in Gabourey Sidibe's Shatterbox Anthology film, *The Tale of Four*. Ledisi released her ninth Grammy-nominated studio album *Let Love Rule*, which features John Legend, Kirk Franklin, and B.J. The Chicago Kid, among others. The album received three Grammy nominations in the "Best R&B Album," "Best R&B Performance" ("High"), and "Best Traditional R&B Performance" ("All The Way") categories.

JAMAR WILLIAMS (Griffin) has appeared Off-Broadway in *Wild Goose Dreams* (Public Theater) *The Hairy Ape* (Park Ave Armory), *The Death of The Last Black Man* (Signature Theater), and *Invisible Thread* (Second Stage) as well as regionally in *Passing Strange* (Wilma Theatre); *Burn All Night*, *Witness Uganda*, *The Black Clown* (A.R.T.); *The Cardboard Piano* (Humana Fest); *Hairspray* and *The Piano Lesson* (Santa Rosa Rep). Workshops and readings he's done include Sundance Theater Lab (a new musical by Jeanine Tesori and David Lindsay Abaire), *Secret Soldiers* (Marsha Norman/Zoe Sarnak, WTF) and Director's Lab 2016 (Lincoln Center). He appeared on tour with Theatre Works USA.

AMBER IMAN (Joy) played Peggy Schuyler and Maria Reynolds in the first national tour of *Hamilton* (Pantages Theatre). Her Broadway credits include *Shuffle Along* and *Soul Doctor*. She's appeared Off-Broadway in *A Civil War Christmas* and *RENT* and regionally as Crystal in *Little Shop of Horrors* (Kennedy Center), Cheryl in *Stick Fly* (Arena Stage) and Aldonza in *Man of La Mancha* (Shakespeare Theatre, Helen Hayes Award nomination for Outstanding Actress & Emery Battis Award for Acting Excellence). She is a Howard University Graduate (2016 James Butcher Alumni Award) and proud founding member of the Broadway Advocacy Coalition.

EMMA HUNTON (Ryan) is a Los Angeles native whose credits include Elphaba on the 1st national tour of *Wicked*, Natalie in the touring and Broadway companies of *Next to Normal* and the Broadway production of *Spring Awakening* as Ilse. She returns to *Witness Uganda* after having previously played the role of Ryan in the A.R.T production. She can currently be seen on Freeform as Davia on the hit television show "Good Trouble."

KAMERON RICHARDSON (Jacob), a CCM BFA Musical Theatre graduate, is making his Wallis

Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts debut. Among his credits are *Aladdin* Broadway National Tour (Ensemble u/s Iago/Babkak); *Aida* and *Seussical* at the St. Louis Muny; *Legally Blonde* (Carlos) and *Singin' in the Rain* (Sid Phillips) at Pittsburgh CLO; *Brownsville Song (B-side For Tray)* (Tray) at Ensemble Theatre Cincinnati; *BlackTop Sky* (Klass) at the Know Theatre Cincinnati; and *The Little Mermaid* (Sebastian) at Sound Stage Live.

DEXTER DARDEN (Ibrahim) is perhaps best known for playing the ensemble leading role of Frypan in the *The Maze Runner* film franchise. His film *Burden* won the audience award at Sundance 2018, in which he stars opposite Forest Whitaker, Garrett Hedlund, Usher Raymond, Andrea Riseborough and Tom Wilkinson. Prior to gaining popularity from the *Maze Runner* films he played Walter Hill in the Warner Brothers feature *Joyful Noise*, opposite Queen Latifah, and was also seen in the Sony feature *Cadillac Records*. Darden has also been seen in the films *Geography Club*, *Standing Ovation*, and *My Brother*. He has guest starred on television programs "Victorious" and "Cougar Town," and has lent his voice to multiple leading roles in the scripted podcast *BRONZEVILLE*, alongside Laurence Fishburne, Larenz Tate, Tracee Ellis Ross and Omari Hardwick.

JORDAN BARROW (Ronny) has joined the cast of *Witness Uganda* after participating in The Wallis' reading of it in September 2017. He was previously seen as Themba Khenketha in the Toronto world premiere production of *Sousatzka*. TV credits include "Pose" (FX) and "Broad City" (Comedy Central). Off-Broadway credits include *The Tempest* (Public Theater's Shakespeare in the Park) and *Held Momentarily* (NY Fringe Encore Series). Regionally, he has appeared in *Peter Pan*, *The Miracle Worker*, and *New Voices* concert series (Paper Mill Playhouse), *Finian's Rainbow*, *The Little Mermaid* (Music Theatre of Wichita), and *Hairspray* (Charleston Stage). Readings and workshops include *Other World* (Developmental Lab), *All Dressed Up...Q2* (NYS&F) and *Sousatzka*. He has a BFA in Musical Theatre from the University of Michigan and The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

SHA'LEAH NIKOLE STUBBLEFIELD (Eden) is a South Central Los Angeles native and an NAACP Theatre Award recipient. Her theater credits include *Gunshot Medley* (High Priestess), *Recorded in Hollywood* (NAACP Theatre award recipient), *Beauty and The Beast* (Chip), *Once on This Island* (Asaka), *Dreamgirls* (Effie), *Hercules* (Hera), *Take On Me*. Her training includes Alfred University, Amazing Grace Conservatory, Hamilton High School Music Academy and she has a BA from Alfred University. She creates original music and does community outreach through her Non Profit organization, My Footprints LA.

NAÄRAI (Grace) hails from Sarasota, FL, where she trained at the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe under the tutelage of her father Nate Jacobs. A proud Howard University alumna, she graduated magna cum laude with a BFA in Theatre Arts in 2014. Since moving to Los Angeles in 2015, she has focused on pursuing her music career and has provided background vocals for Tori Kelly, Kirk Franklin, Logic, Alessia Cara and Beyoncé at Coachella Music Festival. Among her credits are *Black Nativity*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Songbirds of the 70s*, *Jazz Hot Mamas* (Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe). *For Colored Girls*, *Breath, Boom* (Howard University). *Insurrection* and *The Eve of Jackie* (National Black Theatre Troupe, Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts).

KEENAN D. WASHINGTON (Ensemble) is an original cast member of the first national tour of *Hamilton: An American Musical* and a cast member in NBC's "Hairspray Live!" and "Peter Pan Live!" Born in Detroit, MI and raised in Miami, FL by his single mom, he began his theater training with Tanisha Cidel (*Moonlight*) and his dance training with Traci Young-Byron (Young Contemporary Dance Theater). He received a B.F.A from The University of the Arts and is also an alumnus of New World School of the Arts, The School at Jacob's Pillow and Springboard Danse Montreal. His talents have also afforded him the opportunity to sing, dance and tour the world with artists such as Brandy, Taylor Swift, Nicki Minaj, P. Diddy, Pharrell Williams and Ariana Grande, to name a few. He is a NAACP ACT-SO gold medalist and national finalist.

ANTWONE BARNES (Ensemble) says his favorite credits include *The Legend of Bonny Anne* with S.H.E. LA Festival, *My Fair Lady* with Musical Theatre West and *Seussical the Musical* with Amazing Grace Conservatory. He recently worked on a one-year contract with Universal Studios Japan as a vocalist. He earned a B.F.A. in Musical Theatre at Cal State University, Fullerton and has also trained with Jen Krater at Krater Studios.

THURZDAY (Ensemble), who is most notably known for her reoccurring role in the MTV series "Todrick," is also a singer-songwriter and playwright who trained under the leadership/tutelage of Todrick Hall, Debbie Allen and esteemed Broadway director Kevin Ramsey. After traveling the world performing in tours, national commercials and following some of the industry's giants in her favorite roles, ThurZday is releasing the deluxe production of her EP "Waiting To Numb" and her other various original written works.

JAI'LEN JOSEY (Vocalist/Understudy for Rain Lady/Church Lady), an Atlanta, GA native, just made her Broadway debut as Pearl in *SpongeBob SquarePants* at the Palace Theatre. For eight shows per week, Josey blew the roof off the theatre with her amazing voice, receiving standing ovations nightly. A grateful alumni of the Broadway Dreams Foundation, she is a proud winner of the 2014 Jimmy Awards. Her television credits include Tyler Perry's "Love Thy Neighbor." She is currently in the studio recording her first album of original music and enjoys performing at benefit concerts across the United States. She is looking forward to appearing this spring in the upcoming musical production of *The Secret Life of Bees* for the Atlantic Theatre Company.

About the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts:

Since opening its doors in October 2013, The Wallis has produced or presented more than 250 dance, theater, opera, classical music, cinema and family programs to an ever-expanding audience. Located in the heart of Beverly Hills, California, The Wallis brings audiences world-class theater, dance and music, performed by many of the world's most talented and sought-after artists. Featuring eclectic programming that mirrors the diverse landscape of Los Angeles and its notability as the entertainment capital of the world, The Wallis offers original and revered works from across the U.S. and around the globe. The mission of The Wallis is to create, present and celebrate unique performing arts events and educational programs that reflect the rich cultural diversity of our community. Nominated for 48 Ovation Awards, seven L.A. Drama Critic's Circle Awards and the recipient of six architectural awards since opening in 2013. The Wallis is a breathtaking 70,000-square-foot venue that celebrates the classic and the modern and was designed by Zoltan E. Pali, FAIA, of Studio Pali Fekete architects. The building features the restored, original 1933 Beverly Hills Post Office (on the National Register of Historic Places) that

serves as the theater's dramatic yet welcoming lobby, and houses the 150-seat Lovelace Studio Theater, GRoW at The Wallis: A Space for Arts Education (a gift of Gregory Annenberg Weingarten and Family and the Annenberg Foundation) and the contemporary 500-seat, state-of-the-art Bram Goldsmith Theater. Together, these structures embrace the city's history and its future, creating a performing arts destination for L.A.-area visitors and residents alike. For more information about The Wallis, please visit: TheWallis.org.

EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

WHAT:

**WEST COAST PREMIERE of
The Wallis Production of
*WITNESS UGANDA***

A DOCUMENTARY MUSICAL

By Matt Gould & Griffin Matthews

Directed by Griffin Matthews

Music Direction by Matt Gould

Produced In Association with Leslie Odom, Jr., Nicolette Robinson, Cynthia Erivo, Abigail Spencer, Lauran Bromley, Hasan & Jania Askari and Neil & Kate Malik

CAST

Griffin Jamar Williams

Joy Amber Iman

Ryan Emma Hunton

Jacob Kameron Richardson

Ibriham Dexter Darden

Ronny Jordan Barrow

Eden Sha'leah Nikole Stubblefield

Grace Naārai

Rain Lady/Church Lady Ledisi

Ensemble Keenan D. Washington

Ensemble Antwone Barnes

Ensemble Thurzday

Vocalist/Understudy for Rain Lady/Church Lady Jai'len Josey

CREDITS

Writers Matt Gould & Griffin Matthews

Director Griffin Matthews

Music Director Matt Gould

Choreography Abdur-Rahim Jackson

Costumes Carlton Jones

Set Design Conner MacPhee

Lighting Design David Hernandez
Sound Design Martin Carillo
Music Supervisor Remy Kurs
Assistant Director Mark Jacob Chaitin
Casting Chad Murnane of Binder Casting
Stage Manager Sara Sahin

WHEN:

Wednesday, February 6 – Saturday, February 23, 2019
Weekdays, 8 pm; Saturdays 2:30 pm and 8 pm; Sundays 2:30 pm and 7:30 pm

NOTE: Ledisi will not perform on the evening of Friday, February 15 and for both shows on Sunday, February 17. In her absence, Jai'Len Josey will perform the roles of Rain Lady/Church Lady.

RUN TIME:

2 hours and 30 minutes including a 15 minute intermission.

WHERE:

Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts
Lovelace Studio Theater
9390 N. Santa Monica Boulevard
Beverly Hills, CA 90210

TICKET PRICES AND INFORMATION:

\$50 (prices subject to change)

TheWallis.org/Witness

310.746.4000

Box Office – Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts Ticket Services
9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills, CA, 90210

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