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**WALLIS ANNENBERG CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS PRESENTS
ULYSSES OWENS, JR. & J'NAI BRIDGES: *NOTES ON HOPE***

Thursday, April 27, 2023, 7:30 pm
The Wallis' Bram Goldsmith Theater

(Beverly Hills, CA, March 31, 2023) – Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts presents **ULYSSES OWENS, JR. & J'NAI BRIDGES: *NOTES ON HOPE*** featuring Grammy Award-winning mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges and Grammy Award-winning drummer and jazz trailblazer Ulysses Owens Jr. on Thursday, April 27, 2023, 7:30 pm, in The Wallis' Bram Goldsmith Theater. According to *Opera News*, "Bridges' voice is a rich blanket of plush sound," and *Downbeat* says, "Clear, purposeful communication has anchored Ulysses Owens Jr.'s artistry since he was a kid playing drums in church."

Notes On Hope spans the musical spectrum, from exploring works of Duke Ellington to reviving classic art songs once performed by opera matriarchs Jessye Norman, Leontyne Price, and Kathleen Battle, all of whom have since passed the torch to Bridges to carry into the 21st century. Other instrumental moments highlight Owens' musical direction and prowess as a jazz drummer with his stellar ensemble, made of Jalen Baker, vibraphone, Ted Rosenthal, piano, David Rosenthal, guitar, and Carol Robbins, harp.

Owens notes that with regard to their culture and heritage as African American artists, there is a greater subtext between Bridges and himself as they collaborate on a program that highlights Black contributors in the classical and opera realm who have been often overlooked. Their artistry sheds light on works by composers like Florence Price, who truly embodies the adage, "because of them, we are." The evening also features the works of lesser-known jazz composer luminaries such as Geri Allen, whose music fits eloquently within the thematic focus of hope.

The program is divided into three segments. **Divine Hope** focuses on the power of creation and is the conduit between hope and faith. This section begins with "The Lord's Prayer" as a devotional musical moment to cleanse the palette and center on the intention for the evening, which is reverence." Following "The Lord's Prayer," Duke Ellington, who is considered to be one of the greatest American composers, will be featured. Ellington happened to have composed several compositions for soprano voice dating back to the early 1940s. "Creole Love Call" was one of the first compositions that Ellington composed for his orchestra and singer Adelaide Hall, and shortly after he began to work with singers, Kay Davis and Alice Babs. It is important to note that Kay

Davis and Adelaide Hall were trained classical African American singers who were unable to gain work because of the discriminatory barriers, so through Ellington's compositions they were able to perform. Two additional songs will be visited from this era, "On A Turquoise Cloud" and "Heaven." To conclude the Divine Hope segment, the ensemble will perform the classic spiritual, "There is a Balm in Gilead," which references an Old Testament scripture that speaks to the concept of a spiritual medicine that heals sinners. This spiritual has been performed by many great opera singers and is a spiritual rite of passage that only a voice like Bridges' can beautifully deliver and serve as a balm for the audience.

The second segment is titled **The Crux of Hope** which references the most essential shift and point of the process: where difficult matters must be addressed so that hope is a possibility. This segment begins with the composition "Skin" by prolific pianist and composer, the late Geri Allen, who broke many barriers for women in the jazz industry. DuParc's "L'invitation au voyage," composed in 1970, is a setting of two of three verses of the Symbolist poet Baudelaire's famous poem describing his love of the countryside in Holland. "Je te veux" ("I Want You"), composed by Erik Satie with a text from Henry Pacory, has a sensual undertone because of the intimate relationship between Satie and Paulette Darty, which this song beautifully displays. It is a popular song rendered by Jessye Norman, Cecile McLorin Salvant, and many other brilliant vocalists. However, the arrangement performed in *Notes On Hope* is a very unique adaptation featuring unique instrumentation. "La Vie En Rose" ("Life in Happy Hues") also translated as "Life seen through rose colored glasses," is a favorite of Bridges' to sing her adaptation of Edith Piaf's classic lyric. The second segment will conclude with a beautiful Brazilian composition called "Boi Bumba," composed by Valdemar Henrique who is from the North of Brazil, and is inspired by Amazonian folklore, as well as Indigenous and Northeastern Afro-Brazilian Rhythms.

The final segment of the program is titled **Hope Fulfilled** which speaks to the reality that commitment to the journey leads to the fulfillment of efforts and hard work. Florence Price was a trailblazer and arguably the first African American woman to have her Symphony No.1 in E Minor performed by a major orchestra. She once stated, "I have two handicaps- those of sex and race." Her legacy is honored with a performance of two of her songs, first "Adoration," which was initially published in 1951 for the organ, but this arrangement has been orchestrated for rhythm section, harp, marimba, and voice. "Hold Fast to Dreams" is a song that she composed setting a poem by Langston Hughes, from the song collection Five Art Songs. The performance concludes with "It's Good to Have You Near Again," which Owens considers the perfect close to an evening that illustrates notes of hope.

Tickets (\$39-\$99) are on sale now, as are single tickets and subscriptions to all performances in The Wallis' 2022/2023 Season. TheWallis.org/OB

Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts is located at 9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Beverly Hills. To purchase single tickets, subscriptions and for more information, please call 310-746-4000 (Monday – Friday, 10 am to 6 pm), email Tickets@TheWallis.org or visit TheWallis.org.

The Wallis is closely monitoring the ever-changing local health and safety environment carefully and addressing known health factors at the moment. Should plans change and any performance be required to be postponed or cancelled or if venue capacity limitations are instituted, ticket holders will be notified immediately with options for their purchased tickets per The Wallis' ticketing policies.

The health and safety of patrons, staff, and artists inside and outside the venue are a top priority for The Wallis. Facial masks are no longer required but are strongly encouraged and recommended. The Wallis' health and safety protocols are also subject to change at the venue's sole discretion or in accordance with LA County and City of Beverly Hills regulations. Current Health & Safety Protocols and updates may also be accessed at [TheWallis.org/Safety](https://www.thewallis.org/safety). Policies are subject to change.

Performer, producer and educator **ULYSSES OWENS JR.** is a drummer who *The New York Times* has said “take[s] a back seat to no one,” and “a musician who balances excitement gracefully and shines with innovation.” Owens goes the limit in the jazz world and beyond; claiming eight successful albums of his own. He has also gained special attention for his performances on GRAMMY Award-winning albums by Kurt Elling and The Christian McBride Big Band. In addition to five Grammy nominated albums with Joey Alexander, Christian McBride Trio, John Beasley’s Monk’estra, and Gregory Porter. Both *Jazziz* and *Rolling Stone* Magazines picked his album “*Songs of Freedom*,” as a Top Ten Album for 2019 and in 2021 his most recent Big Band release, “*Soul Conversations*,” was voted the top album in May 2021 by *Jazziz* Magazine. “*Soul Conversations*,” was released on the the Outside In Music Label and received rave reviews; was added to multiple playlists on Apple Music, Spotify, and Sirius XM, and now the band is touring nationally. He is also the creator of multiple online jazz drum video courses: “*Finding Your Beat*,” “*The Art of Swing*” and “*Jazz Drumming 101: Everything you need to know to get the gig*,” for Open Studio. He also created, filmed, and produced his own entrepreneurial course for drummer titled “*Be More Than A Drummer*” which teaches drummers how to expand beyond the instrument and accomplish whatever they dream of entrepreneurially. Owens was also host of the highly successful weekly live YouTube series, “*From The Drummer’s Perspective*,” for OpenStudio where he has interviewed Lewis Nash, Terri Lynn Carrington, Nate Smith, Peter Erskine, Matt Wilson, Herlin Riley, Chris “Daddy” Dave, Cindy Blackman and many other legendary drummers. As an author Owens has penned multiple articles for multiple publications (*Jazz Times*, *Downbeat*, and *Percussive Arts Society*.) He has released a Hallmark Drum instructional book titled: “*Jazz Brushes for the Modern Drummer: An Essential Guide to the Art of Keeping Time*,” which is published and distributed by Hal Leonard. His second book which is a career narrative and instructional book about Music Business, Entrepreneurship and Career Development for creative students is titled, “*The Musicians Career Guide: Turning Your Talent into Sustained Success*,” was released by Skyhorse Publishers, and Simon and Schuster on June 8th, 2021 and has been in the a top 5 on Amazon in the Music Business, and Arts and Entrepreneurship book categories. In addition to his work as an author and musician, Owens serves on the faculty at The Juilliard School in the role of Small Ensemble Director. He also serves on the EDIB (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging) committee, and teaches several workshops and courses within the Alan D. Marks Entrepreneurship Center annually. His passion project is his role as the Artistic Director for his family’s non-profit organization, “Don’t Miss A Beat,” in Jacksonville, Florida that utilizes the arts as a bridge to a better life for “At-Hope” students. In 2021, DMAB produced their Inaugural Community Event, “*The Don’t Miss A Beat Jazz Festival*,” at Woodstock Park in partnership with the City of Jacksonville and over 2000 people were in attendance. Owens has also received the “*Difference Maker*” Award from Beacon College, the “*Robert Arleigh White Advocacy Award*” from the Cultural Council of Northeast Florida; and has been multi-year recipient of the *Individual Artist Grant* from the Community Foundation of Northeast Florida. Owens remains consistently in demand for new projects, and consulting opportunities, remaining one of the most sought-after drummers, educators and thought leaders of his generation. Yet what matters to him consistently is giving back and continuing to be grateful for a new day to make a difference in the lives of others.

J’NAI BRIDGES (mezzo-soprano), known for her “plush-voiced mezzo-soprano” (*The New York Times*), and “calmly commanding stage presence” (*The New Yorker*) has been heralded as “a rising star” (*Los Angeles Times*), gracing the world’s top opera and concert stages. The 2022-23 season will spotlight Bridges in one of her signature roles as Carmen with debut engagements at the Arena di Verona, Canadian Opera Company, and a return to Dutch National Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. As a native of Tacoma, WA, Bridges’ concert engagements include a world premiere by Carlos Simon in April 2023 with the National Symphony Orchestra. Bridges’ recital engagements for the season begin with the performance of a world

premiere by Jimmy Lopez at 92NY in December, and continue throughout 2023 at Washington University, Thomasville Center for the Arts, The Cliburn, Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, San Francisco Performances, and the Mondavi Center in Davis, California. Bridges' 2021-22 season highlights included numerous world premiere engagements as a guest artist in The Kennedy Center's 50th Anniversary Season. Bridges' time in Washington D.C. also included performances with The National Philharmonic in the world premiere of Adolphus Hailstork's *A Knee on the Neck*, and Mozart's *Requiem*, and her first performance of the Verdi *Requiem* with the Cathedral Choral Society. She also appeared with the Amarillo Symphony as a guest artist in a world premiere piece by Chris Rogerson entitled *Sacred Earth*, and she gave a solo recital at the McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton. In June 2022 she performed Lieberson's *Neruda Songs* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel as part of the *Power to the People!* festival, followed by her debut with the San Francisco Symphony singing *Jocasta* in Peter Sellars' production of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen. She concluded her summer season singing a solo recital at Caramoor. In the midst of the worldwide pandemic, she emerged as a leading figure in classical music's shift toward conversations of inclusion and racial justice in the performing arts. In 2022 she was announced as one of the Kennedy Center's NEXT50 cultural leaders. Bridges led a highly successful panel on race and inequality in opera with the Los Angeles Opera that drew international acclaim for being a "conversation of striking scope and candor" (*The New York Times*). In early 2021, Bridges was featured in the Converse shoe brand's All Stars Campaign for its *Breaking Down Barriers* collection. Bridges also performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel for two episodes of the digital *SOUND/STAGE* series, and as part of the Global Citizen movement's *Global Goal* campaign, a program which also included Coldplay, Shakira, Usher and more. The pandemic also forced the cancellation of Bridges' numerous debuts during the 2020-2021 season including the title role of *Carmen* at The Metropolitan Opera. Bridges' 2019 – 2020 season included her highly-acclaimed debut at The Metropolitan Opera as *Nefertiti* in a sold-out run of Philip Glass' opera *Akhnaton*, as well as a house and role debut with Washington National Opera as *Dalila* in *Samson et Dalila*. Other recent highlights include the 2022 Grammy® Award-winning Metropolitan Opera production of *Akhnaton* and 2021 Grammy® Award-winning recording of Richard Danielpour's oratorio *The Passion of Yeshua* with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, performing at the National Library of Congress to honor legendary fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg as she received the 2022 Ruth Bader Ginsburg Woman of Leadership Award, her sold-out Carnegie Hall Recital debut, her role debut of *Kasturbai* in *Satyagraha* at LA Opera, and her debuts at Dutch National Opera and the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona. Bridges also created the role of *Josefa Segovia* in the world premiere of John Adams' *Girls of the Golden West* at San Francisco Opera, and performed in the world premiere of *Bel Canto* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, an opera by Jimmy Lopez based on the novel by Ann Patchett. Bridges is a recipient of the prestigious 2018 Sphinx Medal of Excellence Award, a 2016 Richard Tucker Career Grant, first prize winner at the 2016 Francisco Viñas International Competition, first prize winner at the 2015 Gerda Lissner Competition, a recipient of the 2013 Sullivan Foundation Award, a 2012 Marian Anderson award winner, the recipient of the 2011 Sara Tucker Study Grant, the recipient of the 2009 Richard F. Gold Grant from The Shoshana Foundation, and the winner of the 2008 Leontyne Price Foundation Competition. Bridges completed a three-year residency with the Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago, represented the United States at the prestigious BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition and was a Young Artist at the Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, New York. A native of Tacoma, Washington, she earned her Master of Music degree from Curtis Institute of Music, and her Bachelor of Music degree in vocal performance from the Manhattan School of Music.

About Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts:

Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts is a dynamic cultural hub and community resource where local, national, and international artists share their artistry with ever-expanding audiences. The campus, located in the heart of Beverly Hills, CA, is committed to robust and distinctive presentations and education programs curated with both creativity and social impact in mind. Distinguished by its eclectic programming that mirrors the diverse landscape of Los Angeles and its location in the entertainment capital of the world, The Wallis has produced and presented more than 350 theater, dance, music, film, cabaret, conversation, and family entertainment programs since its doors opened in October 2013. Hailed as "au courant" (*LaLa Magazine*), The Wallis was lauded by *Culture Vulture*, which proclaims, "If you love expecting the unexpected in the performing arts, you have to love The Wallis." Its programming has been nominated for

79 Ovation Awards and nine L.A. Drama Critic's Circle Awards. The campus itself, a breathtaking 70,000-square-foot facility, celebrating the classic and the modern, has garnered six architectural awards. Designed by acclaimed architect Zoltan E. Pali (SPF:architects), the restored building features the original 1933 Beverly Hills Post Office (on the National Register of Historic Places), which serves as the theater's dramatic yet welcoming lobby, and includes the contemporary 500-seat, state-of-the-art Bram Goldsmith Theater; the 150-seat Lovelace Studio Theater; an inviting open-air plaza for family, community and other performances; and GRoW @ The Wallis: A Space for Arts Education, where learning opportunities for all ages and backgrounds abound. Together, these elements embrace the city's history and its future, creating a performing arts destination for L.A.-area visitors and residents alike. Michael Nemeroff is Chairman of The Wallis' Board of Directors.

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EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

WHAT:

WALLIS ANNENBERG CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS PRESENTS

ULYSSES OWENS, JR. & J'NAI BRIDGES: *NOTES ON HOPE*

PROGRAM

I. Divine Hope

The Lord's Prayer

Heaven - Duke Ellington

There is a Balm in Gilead - Spiritual

II. The Crux of Hope

Skin - Geri Allen (instrumental)

L'invitation au voyage - Duparc

Je te veux – Satie

La Vie En Rose

Boi Bumba - Waldermar Henrique

III. Hope Fulfilled

Adoration - Florence Price

Hold Fast to Your Dreams - Florence Price

It's Good to Have You Near Again - Andre Previn

(program subject to change)

Jalen Baker, vibraphone

Ted Rosenthal, piano

David Rosenthal, guitar

Carol Robbins, harp

WHEN:

Thursday, April 27, 2023, 7:30 pm

The Wallis' Bram Goldsmith Theater

RUNNING TIME:

Approximately 90 minutes with no intermission.

TICKET PRICES AND INFORMATION:

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PLEASE NOTE:

Due to current health and safety variables, performances are subject to change, postponement, or cancellation.