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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 2016

**The Wilma Theater Continues its 2015-2016 Season with
Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' *An Octoroon*, Directed by Joanna Settle,
Featuring a Philadelphia-based cast and the band ILL DOOTS**

What if all of the white actors in your play quit?

What if you wanted to be sold because your new master let you eat shrimp instead of pig guts?

What if it was a new idea that murders could be solved by photographic evidence?

What if you can't afford a therapist?

What if you put a baby in blackface?

What if you missed your chance to run away because you overslept?

What if you were just trying to write a play about a rabbit and everyone kept calling him a symbol?

"This is a powerful and slippery piece of art, one that hinges on raw, raucous, and energetic momentum—on approaching race head-on and asking questions no one wants to answer," said Director Joanna Settle of Branden-Jacobs Jenkins' play *An Octoroon*, which Settle will direct at The Wilma Theater this March.

"There are so many things that you 'aren't supposed to say' in today's society, and people have gotten paralyzed about how to have a conversation: I'm skeptical of that." Settle responded immediately to the play, "an almost muscular response; it hits very hard as a big, race-driven party, moving into all the secret corners of race and gender." In Settle's production, *An Octoroon*'s characters are barreling towards a moment of crisis. "America is a great idea. It often goes horribly wrong."

***An Octoroon* begins on Wednesday, March 16, 2016; and opens on Wednesday, March 23, 2016.**

Critics and members of the press are invited to attend Press Night on Wednesday, March 23, at 7:30pm. For ticket arrangements, contact Alison Ehrenreich at aehrenreich@wilmatheater.org, or 215.893.9456 x102.

Obie Award-winning playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins takes the plot of Dion Boucicault's 1859 antebellum melodrama, *The Octoroon*, and smashes it with a 21st century sensibility. Presented through the eyes of the onstage playwright BJJ, this pre-Civil War tale set in the Deep South tells of a slave owner's affections for a woman whose blood is one-eighth Black. Ignited by Joanna Settle's bold direction, the production will feature choreography by Ayo Jackson and original music by ILL DOOTS to create a theatrical event that is equally hilarious and moving, subversive and provocative. The Wilma's *An Octoroon* promises to be ripe for audience conversation around race in today's society, and the role that theater plays with this dialogue.

An Octoroon is fueled by live music performed onstage by Philadelphia band ILL DOOTS, whose artistic mission to "change the way our communities respond to and value music, art, and life" aligns closely with Settle's aim to provoke frank discussions around the play. Settle's previous collaboration with ILL DOOTS was another racially-charged project: the world premiere of Flashpoint Theatre Company's *Hands Up: 6 Playwrights, 6 Testaments*, garnered a Barrymore Award for best original music. Local actor and playwright James Ijames—who recently received an Honorable Mention for the Kessilring Playwriting Prize for his play *The Most Spectacularly Lamentable Trial of Miz Martha Washington*, and the Terrence McNally New Play Award for the development of his play *White*—will be taking on the role of BJJ, Jacob-Jenkins' fourth-wall-breaking black playwright protagonist.

In keeping with Settle's aim to use this production to spearhead conversations about race within the greater Philadelphia community, several members of *An Octoroon*'s cast will serve as teaching artists, leading pre-show discussions in local schools before students attend matinees of the production here at the Wilma. A record number of students will also be participating in Wilmagination, the Wilma's fully subsidized educational outreach program, through in-school residencies around *An Octoroon* in Philadelphia public high schools.

About the Playwright:

Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' plays include *Gloria* (Vineyard Theatre), *Appropriate* (Obie Award; Outer Critics Circle Nomination; Signature Theatre), *Neighbors* (The Public Theater), *An Octoroon* (Obie Award; Soho Rep, Theatre for a New Audience) and *War* (Yale Rep). Branden is currently a Residency Five playwright at the Signature Theater. His work has been seen at Actor's Theater of Louisville, Victory Gardens Theater, Woolly Mammoth Theater, The Matrix Theater in LA, Mixed Blood Theater in Minneapolis, CompanyOne in Boston, and the HighTide Festival in the UK. He is under commissions from Lincoln Center/LCT3, MTC, Center Theater Group and Steppenwolf. Honors include a Paula Vogel Award, a fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts, a Helen Merrill Award, and the inaugural Tennessee Williams award. He has taught at NYU and Queens University of Charlotte and holds an M.A. in Performance Studies from NYU and a B.A. from Princeton University. Graduate of the Lila Acheson Wallace Playwrights Program at The Juilliard School.

About the Director:

Joanna Settle most recently directed *Hands Up* with Flashpoint Theater; *Rapture, Blister, Burn* for The Wilma Theater; and Jaime Leonhart's *Estuary* at Joe's Pub and The Kimmel Center. Other credits include *Family Album* by Stew and Heidi Rodewald (Oregon Shakespeare Festival); *Harry Clarke* by David Cale (Warhol Museum); *Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer's Night Dream, Othello, Much Ado About Nothing* (Shakespeare on the Sound); *The Total Bent* by Stew and Heidi Rodewald; Winter Miller's *In Darfur*, the finale of Suzan-Lori Parks' *365 Days/365 Plays*, Stephen Brown's *Future Me* (The Public Theater). She directed the premiere of Heather Raffo's *Nine Parts of Desire* for Manhattan Ensemble Theater and restaged the production for The Geffen Playhouse, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, MassMOCA, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and Arena Stage; directed and/or adapted 15 of Chicago's Division 13 Productions 17 projects, including *BLOOD LINE: The Oedipus/Antigone Story*, two plays by Sophocles, *Macbeth* by Ionesco, and several Samuel Beckett shorts including *Cascando* and *Play*. Other Credits: Artistic Director, Shakespeare on the Sound (2009-2012); Artistic Director of Division 13 (1998-2004). Teaching: Director of the Ira Brind School of Theater Arts, The University of the Arts, Philadelphia. Education: BA, Hampshire College; graduate of the inaugural Julliard School Graduate Directing Program.

Cast and Design Team:

An Octoroon's cast includes Aaron Bell (Wilma Theater debut) as Br'er Rabbit/Captain Ratts, Taysha Canales (*The Hard Problem*) as Dido, Jaylene Clark Owens (Wilma Theater debut) as Minnie, James Ijames (*Angels in America, Parts One and Two*) as BJJ/George/M'Closky, Justin Jain (*Antigone*) as Assistant/Pete/Paul, Alina John (Wilma Theater debut) as Grace, Maggie Johnson (Wilma Theater debut) as Dora, Campbell Meaghan O'Hare (*Rapture, Blister, Burn*) as Zoe, and Ed Swidey (*Antigone, Hamlet, Our Class*) as Playwright/Wahnotee/LaFouche.

The artistic team includes Set Designer **Matt Saunders** (*The Hard Problem; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead; Hamlet; Don Juan Comes Home from Iraq*), Costume Designer **Tilly Grimes** (Wilma Theater debut), Lighting Designer **Thom Weaver** (*The Hard Problem; Rapture, Blister, Burn; The Real Thing*), Sound Designer **Zachary Beattie-Brown** (*Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*), and Choreographer **Ayo Jackson** (Wilma Theater debut). Philadelphia-based band **ILL DOOTS** will be playing onstage in the production. The production's resident stage manager is Patreshettarlini Adams, and its production manager is Clayton Tejada.

Special Events and Opportunities:

College Night: Wednesday, March 16, 6:30pm

College students are invited to join classmates and meet students from other colleges and universities for a complimentary pre-show reception. Before the show they can enjoy food, friends, and win prizes!

Beer Tasting pre-show reception with Naked Brewing Company: Friday, March 18, 7pm

Join us for a pre-show beer tasting in our lobby from 7 to 8pm with Naked Brewing Company—complimentary for ticket-holders to that evening's performance!

Directors Gathering Dialogue: Tuesday, March 22

Immediately following the performance, a member of the Directors Gathering will join *An Octoroon* director Joanna Settle for an audience-led conversation to discuss the behind-the-scenes process of making *An Octoroon*.

Post-Show Chats: Thursday, March 24, March 31, and April 7

Learn more about the production through discussions with artists and audience members following the performance.

Coffee Chat: Wednesday, April 6

Chat with literary staff about *An Octoroon* and enjoy complimentary coffee from Saxbys Coffee following Wednesday's matinee performance.

Young Friends pre-show reception: Friday, April 1, 7pm

For audience members 40 and under, this performance includes a complimentary pre-show food and drink reception at the Wilma from 7 to 8pm!

Open Captioning: Saturday, April 9, 2pm

Student Matinees: March 30 and April 7, 10am

Tickets: Under our new Wilma WynTix initiative all tickets, including subscription tickets, for all days and times throughout the full four-week mainstage run will be enjoyed by the general public at the subsidized rate of \$25 or \$10 for students and theater artists with valid ID. Tickets are available at the Wilma's Box Office by calling 215.546.7824, visiting wilmatheater.org, or coming to the theater, located at 265 South Broad Street in Philadelphia.

This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. Linda and David Glickstein are the Honorary Producers. The Sporting Club at the Bellevue and the DoubleTree Hotel are Season Sponsors.

Mission: The Wilma Theater creates living, adventurous art. We engage artists and audiences in imaginative reflection on the complexities of contemporary life. We present bold, original, well-crafted productions that represent a range of voices, viewpoints, and styles.

What: *An Octoroon*, by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins

Directed by Joanna Settle

Where: The Wilma Theater

265 South Broad Street

Philadelphia, PA 19107

When: March 16 – April 10, 2016. Opening Night: March 23, 2016. *Reviewing members of the press are invited to attend opening night and may reserve tickets by contacting Alison Ehrenreich, Marketing and Community Relations Manager, at aehrenreich@wilmatheater.org.*

Summary: Obie Award-winning playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins takes the plot of Dion Boucicault's 1859 antebellum melodrama, *The Octoroon*, and smashes it with a 21st century sensibility. Presented through the eyes of the onstage playwright BJJ, this pre-Civil War tale set in the Deep South tells of a slave owner's affections for a woman whose blood is one-eighth Black. Ignited by Joanna Settle's bold direction, the production will feature choreography and original music by ILL DOOTS to create a theatrical event that is equally hilarious and moving, subversive and provocative. The Wilma's *An Octoroon* promises to be ripe for audience conversation around race in today's society, and the role that theater plays with this dialogue.

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Cast:

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Taysha Canales as Dido

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James Ijames as BJJ/George/M'Closky

Justin Jain as Assistant/Pete/Paul

Alina John as Grace

Maggie Johnson as Dora

Campbell Meaghan O'Hare as Zoe

Ed Swidey as Playwright/Wahnotee/LaFouche

Artistic Team:

Director: Joanna Settle

Set Design: Matt Saunders

Costume Design: Tilly Grimes

Lighting Design: Thom Weaver

Sound Design: Zachary Beattie-Brown

Band and Original Music: ILL DOOTS

Choreographer: Ayo Jackson

Production Manager: Clayton Tejada

Resident Stage Manager: Patreshettarlini Adams

Current Press Contact:

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