

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Joshua Ford

Director of Marketing and Communications

[jford@olneytheatre.org](mailto:jford@olneytheatre.org)

**ROUND HOUSE THEATRE AND OLNEY THEATRE CENTER'S  
CO-PRODUCTION OF *FELA!* TO STAR BROADWAY VETERAN  
DUAIN RICHMOND**

**The story of Nigerian superstar Fela Kuti to be directed by 2023 Helen Hayes Award-recipient Lili-Anne Brown in first regional production of the Tony-winning musical since the national tour over a decade ago**

**Olney, MD — June 1, 2023 — *Fela!*, Olney Theatre Center and Round House Theatre's first co-production since their Helen Hayes Award-winning collaboration on *In The Heights*, begins previews on Olney Theatre's Roberts Mainstage July 7. Running through August 13, the Tony Award-winning musical uses the songs of **Fela Kuti** and a book created by **Bill T. Jones and Jim Lewis** to tell the story of the Pan-African superstar's final concert at the legendary Afrika Shrine. The revival, the first full production since the National Tour closed in 2013, is directed by **Lili-Anne Brown**, who recently received the **Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Director of a Play** for her work on Woolly Mammoth's *Ain't No Mo'*. **Duain Richmond** tackles the titular role, which he played both on Broadway and in subsequent "Fela: The Concert" presentations.**

**Press is invited to request two tickets to the Opening Night performance on Thursday, July 13 at 8:00 pm by emailing [sstraub@olneytheatre.org](mailto:sstraub@olneytheatre.org). Tickets cost \$47-\$100 and are available at [olneytheatre.org](http://olneytheatre.org) or by calling the box office (301-924-3400).**

On returning to the role of Fela, **Duain Richmond** says, "The story of Fela Kuti is one of resilience, strength, perseverance, and power. It's a perfect demonstration of what it looks like when we live a life without fear, and that's why those who are familiar with his life and music will always be friends forever. I am honored and excited to step into this role again to tell his story because it's my story, it's all of our stories as a human race. In an interview Fela once did, he said, 'I am *Anikulapo*... which means he who carries death in his pouch, they can't kill me because I will live forever.' He's doing just that."

Joining Richmond in the cast are **Nova Y. Payton** (who herself just received a Helen Hayes Award for her performance in Signature Theatre's production of *The Color Purple*), who plays Fela's martyred mother Funmilayo; and **Shantel Cribbs** as Fela's girlfriend Sandra. Cribbs makes her DC-area premiere following leading roles at The Muny, Paramount Theatre, and Drury Lane.

The ensemble includes **Bryan Archibald, Terrence J. Bennett, Simone Brown, Patrick Leonardo Casimir, Jyreika Guest, Bryan Jeffrey, Raquel Jennings, Emmanuel Kikoni,**

**Raven Lorraine, Vaughn Ryan Midder, Ywande Odetoyinbo** (also Funmilayo Understudy), **Jantanies Thomas, Galen J. Williams** (also Fela Understudy), **Jalisa Williams** and **Kanysha Williams** (also Sandra Understudy). Included in the ensemble as a djembe player is **Amadou Kouyate**, a multi-instrumental artist and an alum of the Artist-in-Residence program at Strathmore Music Center. Swings for the production are **Malachi Alexander** and **Shawna Williams**.

Joining Brown's creative team are Music Director **S. Renee Clark**, Choreographer **Breon Arzell**, Scenic Designer **Arnel Sancianco**, Costume Designer **Rueben Echoles**, Lighting Designer **Sherrice Mogjani**, Projections Designer **Kelly Colburn**, Sound Designer **Matt Rowe**, Intimacy Consultant **Jyreika Guest**, Dialect Coach **Kim James Bey**, Cultural Consultant **Abi Jinadu**, Out of Town Casting Director **Sarah Cooney**, and Production Stage Manager **Jamie Berry**.

*Fela!* is the first of back-to-back co-productions between Olney Theatre Center and Round House Theatre bridging the 22-23 and 23-24 seasons. While *Fela!* closes the season on the Olney campus, *Ink* by James Graham will open the 23-24 season in Round House's Bethesda home, beginning August 30 in a production directed by Olney's Artistic Director Jason Loewith. Said Loewith of the co-productions, "I really believe that the collaboration between our two institutions is a model of how two regional theatres from the same county can work together to make art that is more ambitious, more open, and more sustainable."

"Round House is thrilled to continue our partnership with Olney Theatre Center with this extraordinary production of FELA before welcoming audiences to Round House at the start of next season for *Ink*," says **Round House Theatre Artistic Director Ryan Rilette**. "*Fela!* is an extraordinarily compelling, high-spirited show, and we are thrilled to have such a dynamic team in place for it. This is sure to be the hottest show this Summer!"

### **First Time Free**

Once again, Olney Theatre Center is making **4 free tickets to preview performances of *Fela!*** (July 7 - 12) available to new patrons who have never attended a production. Those tickets may be reserved by using the code **1stTimeFree** prior to selecting seats.

### **Free Play**

Round House Theatre offers free tickets for students ages 13 through college through its Free Play program. For more information, visit [RoundHouseTheatre.org/FreePlay](http://RoundHouseTheatre.org/FreePlay).

### **On the House**

On the House, Round House Theatre's community ticket access program seeks to remove barriers that can make it difficult for some members of our community to experience our work by providing complimentary group tickets to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and community-serving organizations with a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor. For more information, visit [RoundHouseTheatre.org/On-Stage/OnTheHouse](http://RoundHouseTheatre.org/On-Stage/OnTheHouse).

## **EVENT DETAILS**

### **Fela!**

Music and Lyrics by Fela Kuti

Book by Bill T. Jones and Jim Lewis

(Additional music by Aaron Johnson and Jordan McLean)

Directed by Lili-Anne Brown

Choreography by Breon Arzell

Music Direction by S. Renee Clark

Scenic Designer Arnel Sancianco

Costume Designer Rueben Echoles

Lighting Designer Sherrice Mogjani

Projections Designer Kelly Colburn

Sound Designer Matt Rowe

Intimacy Consultant Jyreika Guest

Dialect Coach Kim James Bey

Cultural Consultant Abi Jinadu,

Out of Town Casting by Sarah Cooney

Production Stage Manager Jamie Berry

### **Begins performances: July 7, 2023**

**Previews:** July 7 -12, 2023

**Press opening:** Thursday, July 13 at 8:00 pm (RSVP to [sstraub@olneytheatre.org](mailto:sstraub@olneytheatre.org))

**Scheduled to run through:** August 13, 2023

Performances Wednesday through Saturday at 8:00 pm, Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 pm, Wednesday matinees at 2:00 pm July 12, 26, and Aug 2. No Saturday matinee on July 8.

### **Accessibility**

GalaPro captioning on smartphones and tablets is available for all performances.

Audio-described performance for the visually impaired on Wednesday, July 19 at 8:00 pm.

Sign-interpreted performance on Thurs., August 10 at 8:00 pm.

### **Related Events**

#### **Pan-African Art Happy Hour at [Èkó House](#)**

Sunday, July 9, 2023 from 4 to 6 PM

Location: [Èkó House](#) in Rockville Town Center (150 Gibbs Street, Rockville, Maryland)

Drinks and snacks available for purchase.

If you've been to [Èkó House](#) before, you know the restaurant is a feast for the stomach *and* the eyes! Join us for a happy hour hang-out that will transport you to the city of Lagos. African fine

art will be on display, with some items up for sale, and a DJ will play suave and bumpin Nigerian beats.

### **Behind the Scenes -**

#### **Opening Night Panel: Performance and Political Resistance**

Thursday, July 13, 2023

5:00 - 6:00 PM

Roberts Mainstage

Olney Theatre Center

\$10/Free for Olney Theatre members and Round House subscribers

Learn more about Fela Kuti and the history of political resistance through art and music with **Stephanie Shonekan**, professor of ethnomusicology and dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Maryland, poet and theatre artist and activist **Christopher Prince**, and multidisciplinary performance and visual artist **Holly Bass**.

### **Beyond the Stage-**

#### **Fashion & Trunk Show - Designer Busayo, Bibire International**

Saturday, July 22

6:00 - 7:30 PM

Olney Theatre's 1938 Original Theatre Lobby

Our first-ever fashion show features the works of local Nigerian-American designer Busayo and Bibiré International, a black woman-owned business creating high-end clothing with an Afropolitan vibe.

### **Beyond the Stage -**

#### **Nigerian/Afro-Tempo Dance Lesson**

Sunday, July 30

6:30 - 7:30 PM

Olney Theatre's Omi's Pavilion (outdoors)

Ticket: \$10

These Afrobeat-inspired dances will get you moving to music from all over West Africa.

### **In the Community -**

#### **Nigerian Story Hour at Olney Library**

Sunday, June 25, 2023

11 AM to 12 PM

Olney Public Library (3500 Olney Laytonsville Rd, Olney, MD 20832)

FREE (No registration. Just show up!)

As part of our celebration of *Fela!*, we're sponsoring a morning of stories at the Olney Public Library hosted by Femi Fakinlede. This is a free family event appropriate for all ages, especially

toddlers, preschoolers, and young children. Books to be read are chosen with the help of the Olney librarian.

### **VIVA AFRICA! Community Night at Olney Theatre**

Thursday, August 3, 2023 from 6 to 10:00 PM

**Cost:** \$45 with promo code VIVAAFRICA

**Ticket includes:** pre-show Community Night mixer and theatre ticket

Drinks and snacks available for purchase.

Join us to celebrate VIVA AFRICA! Community Night with a special offer for \$45 tickets to the regional premiere of *Fela!* and that night's pre-show mixer! This is an affinity space; an opportunity for those who identify as of the African diaspora to experience art and celebrate their heritage in community. Allies are lovingly welcomed to attend another performance during the run of the show.

**6-7:30 p.m.:** Mixer with actress Kike Ayodeji, where folks can mingle, eat, dance, and celebrate.

[Èkó House](#) will be selling their delicious Nigerian and African-fusion food!

**Location:** Actors Hall, Olney Theatre Center

**8:00 p.m.:** Production of *Fela!*

**Location:** Roberts Mainstage (just steps away from the event)

For more community events related to *Fela* visit [olneytheatre.org/community](https://olneytheatre.org/community)

### **ABOUT ROUND HOUSE THEATRE**

Round House Theatre is one of the leading professional theatres in the Washington, DC area, producing a season of new plays, modern classics, and musicals for more than 40,000 patrons each year at our theatre in Bethesda. Round House has been nominated for 213 Helen Hayes Awards and has won 42, including four Outstanding Resident Play Awards and the Charles MacArthur Award for Original New Play in 2016. Round House's lifelong learning and education programs serve more than 5,000 students each year at its Education Center in Silver Spring, in schools throughout Montgomery County, and at our Bethesda theatre. Cornerstone programs include Free Play, which provides free tickets for students ages 13-college, the Teen Performance Company, which culminates in the student-produced Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, Summer Camp for students in grades K-12, and a full slate of classes for adults and youth.

### **ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER**

#### **Mission**

Olney Theatre Center for the Arts produces and curates theatrical performance for the diverse audiences in our community, and educates, learns from, supports and inspires a more inclusive generation of theater-makers.

### **Vision**

We strive to become an arts and culture powerhouse, redefining the American regional theater movement by cultivating and sharing the creativity of our community.

### **History**

Founded in 1938 as a summer playhouse, Olney Theatre Center (OTC) now produces world and American premieres of plays and musicals, and reimaginings of familiar titles year-round; presents the work of leading companies and artists; tours nationally and locally; teaches students of all ages; and mentors a more inclusive generation of theatremakers. For more than 8 decades, OTC has brought impactful theater performance and education to our community, helping to grow the vibrancy and vitality of our home in the Washington, DC region.

Over the years, some of the biggest names in theater and film have appeared on our stages, including Tallulah Bankhead, Helen Hayes, Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Bob Fosse, Phillip Bosco, Eve Arden, Eva Gabor, Burl Ives, Jose Ferrer, Carol Channing, Olivia d'Havilland, Tony Randall, Paulette Goddard, Dorothy and Lillian Gish, Jane Seymour, Anne Revere, Frances Sternhagen, Arthur Treacher, James Broderick, Olympia Dukakis, Sir Ian McKellen, Marica Gay Harden, John Colicos, Uzo Aduba, Alan Cumming, Cheyenne Jackson, Robin de Jesus, Wilson Jermaine Heredia, among many, many others.

Olney Theatre is now the cultural anchor of a rapidly changing region and serves one of the most diverse, best educated, and wealthiest counties in the country. Situated on the unceded land of the Piscataway-Conoy people, the Olney area was once a rural farming community with a unique Quaker heritage. Now the area is occupied by every kind of family that makes up 21st Century America, along with major corporations, shopping districts, civic associations, non profit organizations and a diverse collection of houses of worship. Montgomery County's 1 million residents play a dynamic role in the Baltimore-Washington corridor, and are a driving force behind the region's creative economy.

Olney Theatre Center employs 40 full-time staff, 20 part-time positions, 26 early career apprentices and players, and more than 400 professional artists annually. The Theatre intends to continue expanding to better meet the needs of our community.

For more information, please visit [olneytheatre.org/history](http://olneytheatre.org/history)

Follow Olney Theatre Center on Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok @olneytheatre and on Facebook at [facebook.com/olneytheatre](https://facebook.com/olneytheatre).

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