

# APOLLO 85

## *Twisted Melodies: The Donny Hathaway Story*

*An Apollo Theater co-production with Baltimore Center Stage and Mosaic Theater*

A Powerful One Man Show Honoring the Artistic Legacy and Personal Struggles  
of Singer and Composer **Donny Hathaway**

Written by and Starring **Kelvin Roston, Jr.**

*May 30 – June 2, 2019*

**Harlem, NY** – (January 15, 2019) The Apollo Theater will bring the New York premiere of ***TWISTED MELODIES***, an intimate one-man production about the life, artistry, and struggles of 1970s soul singer and composer Donny Hathaway, to its iconic stage, 45 years after Hathaway himself last performed on it. From his hits with Roberta Flack, his solo songs, and his work as both an arranger and studio musician for artists such as Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield, and the Staples Singers, to his diagnosis of schizophrenia, Hathaway's personal struggles both inspired and hampered his music. On the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his untimely death, Hathaway will be honored posthumously with the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in February 2019, celebrating his influence and contributions to the music industry that continue today. Directed by **Derrick Sanders** and featuring **Kelvin Roston Jr.**, this limited engagement at the Apollo Theater opens on **Thursday, May 30 and runs through Sunday, June 2**. Ahead of the production, a free **Live Wire** conversation with musician **Gordon Chambers**, "Everything is Everything, the Music of Donny Hathaway," will take place on **May 13 at 6:30p.m.** as part of the Theater's education series that honors iconic artists who have impacted the arts and culture.

"Roston inhabits his troubled man, feels what he feels, honors his complexity, and sings his songs as if his life depended on doing them justice." *Chicago Tribune*

*Twisted Melodies* joins the other productions in the Apollo's 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season to advance the nonprofit theater's commitment of articulating and projecting the African American narrative through arts and culture commissions, co-productions, and presentations while tackling important social issues for Harlem, New York, and the nation.

"The Apollo prides itself in honoring our artist's legacies, and Donny Hathaway's personal and artistic journey is a vital one to tell," said **Apollo Theater Executive Producer Kamilah Forbes**. "Not only did he make brilliant contributions to the musical cannon, we can still learn today from his struggle with mental illness, an issue that is too often kept hidden. It is an honor to partner with Baltimore Center Stage and Mosaic Theater Company to tell this powerful story and engage with audience members across the nation."

***TWISTED MELODIES*** is an immersive play about Donny Hathaway (October 1, 1945 – January 13, 1979), the jazz, blues, soul and gospel singer, arranger, organist, and pianist best known for his duets with Roberta Flack such as "The Closer I Get to You" and "Where is the Love?"— for which he and Flack won

a Grammy Award — his first single that announced his arrival on the music scene, “The Ghetto, Pt. 1,” and his challenging inner struggles with paranoid schizophrenia that eventually led to his death. Torn between the muses that inspired him and the mental illness that tormented him, Chicago-based writer and actor Kelvin Roston, Jr. embodies Hathaway as he evaluates the choices he made during his life. Those choices created a body of work that continues to resonate today, influencing artists such as Alicia Keys, Common, and Raul Midón.

The Apollo holds artists’ voices at its core, and ***TWISTED MELODIES*** celebrates Hathaway’s profound artistry and private struggles, offering audiences the opportunity to learn more about the man behind the music. The production continues to expand the nonprofit theater’s programming and its commitment to celebrating African American arts and culture, supporting emerging and established artists, and serving as a cultural and civic resource for the larger Harlem community. ***TWISTED MELODIES*** is co-produced by Baltimore Center Stage and the Mosaic Theater Company.

Scheduled for fall 2020, the Apollo will open the theaters at the Victoria, the first phase in creating the Apollo Performing Arts Center, and the first physical expansion in the theater’s 85-year history. For more information about the theaters at the Victoria and the Apollo’s mission to work with and support a greater number of emerging and established artists of color across disciplines, click [here](#).

The Apollo’s 2018-19 season continues with an expanded roster of co-productions including, *Race Music*, in conjunction with AFROPUNK, *Africa Now*, *WOW – Women of the World Festival*, the signature series: *Amateur Night at the Apollo*, the Theater’s original talent competition, *Apollo Music Café*, which showcases new musical artists and *Apollo Comedy Club*, which features up-and-coming comedic artists. The Apollo will also present public conversations, education programs for students and families, and other community events throughout the season.

### **TICKET INFO**

Tickets for *Twisted Melodies* are available now at the Apollo Theater Box Office: (212) 531-5305, 253 West 125th Street, and Ticketmaster at 1-800-745-3000 or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com).

### **About the Artists**

**KELVIN ROSTON, JR.** (*Playwright, Music Director, Donny Hathaway*) is an actor/singer/musician based in Chicago, IL. Playwriting credits include—*Twisted Melodies*. National credits include—Black Rep, Metro, Union Ave Opera, Writers, Goodman, Steppenwolf, Court, Black Ensemble, Marriott-Lincolnshire (Chicago, IL), Paramount (Aurora, IL), Fulton, MSMT. International—Orb (Tokyo, Japan), Festival Hall (Osaka, Japan). TV—KFC, Chicago PD, Chicago Med. Film—*Princess Cyd*, *Get a Job*, *Beautiful Hands*. Professional—Artistic Associate of Congo Square Theater Co. Kelvin is represented by Paonessa Talent in Chicago and is a proud member of AEA.

**DERRICK SANDERS** (*Director*). Baltimore Center Stage: *My America Too*, *Clybourne Park*, *Beneatha’s Place*, *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*. Off Broadway—Signature: *King Hedley II*. Regional—Kennedy Center: August Wilson’s 20th Century Cycle: *Seven Guitars*, *King Hedley II*; Cincinnati Playhouse: *Gee’s Bend* (Acclaim Awards: Best Director, Outstanding Production); Virginia Stage Co: *Fences*, *Radio Golf*; Barebones: *Jesus Hopped the A Train*; Lincoln Center Theater: *Sanctified*; Chicago Children’s Theatre: *Bud, Not Buddy*, *Jackie and Me* (world premiere); American Theatre Co: *Topdog/Underdog*; True Colors: *Jitney*, *Stick Fly*; Minneapolis Children’s Theater: *Five Fingers of Funk* (world premiere); Congo Square: *Elmina’s Kitchen* (Midwest premiere); *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* (Black Theatre Alliance Awards, Best Production and Direction); *Seven Guitars* (Jeff Awards, Best Production and Direction), *Deep Azure* (world premiere), *The House That Jack Built*, *Ali* (Black Theatre Alliance Award); Kuntu Rep: *A Cryin’ Shame*; ETA Creative Arts Theatre Co.: *Why Black Men Play Basketball*. Other Professional—Congo Square Founding Artistic Director; Assistant Director: Broadway/Goodman/Mark Taper/Huntington: *Gem Ocean*, and Broadway/Goodman: *Radio Golf*.

### **About the Apollo Theater**

The legendary Apollo Theater—the soul of American culture—plays a vital role in cultivating emerging artists and launching legends. Since its founding, the Apollo has served as a center of innovation and a creative catalyst for Harlem, the city of New York, and the world.

With music at its core, the Apollo's programming extends to dance, theater, spoken word, and more. This includes special programs such as the blockbuster concert *Bruno Mars Live at the Apollo*, the world premiere theatrical reading of Ta-Nehisi Coates's National Book Award-winning *Between the World and Me*, 100: *The Apollo Celebrates Ella*, the annual Africa Now! Festival, and the recent New York premiere of the opera *We Shall Not Be Moved*. The Apollo is a performing arts presenting organization that also produces festivals and large-scale dance and music works organized around a set of core initiatives that celebrate and extend the Apollo's legacy through a contemporary lens; global festivals including the *Women of the World* (WOW) Festival and *Breakin' Convention*; international and U.S.-based artist presentations focused on a specific theme; and Special Projects, multidisciplinary collaborations with partner organizations.

Since introducing the first Amateur Night contests in 1934, the Apollo Theater has served as a testing ground for new artists working across a variety of art forms and has ushered in the emergence of many new musical genres—including jazz, swing, bebop, R&B, gospel, blues, soul, and hip-hop. Among the countless legendary performers who launched their careers at the Apollo are Michael Jackson, Ella Fitzgerald, Stevie Wonder, Billie Holiday, James Brown, D'Angelo, Lauryn Hill, Dave Chappelle, Machine Gun Kelly, Miri Ben Ari, Sarah Vaughan, Gladys Knight, and Luther Vandross; and the Apollo's forward-looking artistic vision continues to build on this legacy. For more information visit <https://www.apollotheater.org/>

### **About Baltimore Center Stage**

Baltimore Center Stage is a theater committed to artistic excellence. We engage, enrich, and broaden the perspectives of diverse audiences through entertaining and thought-provoking work and educational programs. Named the State Theater of Maryland in 1978, Baltimore Center Stage has steadily grown as a leader in the national regional theater scene. Under Executive Director Michael Ross, Baltimore Center Stage is committed to creating and presenting a diverse array of world premieres and exhilarating interpretations of established works. Baltimore Center Stage believes in access for all—creating a welcoming environment for everyone who enters its doors and, at the same time, striving to meet audiences where they are. In addition to Mainstage and Third Space productions in the historic Mount Vernon neighborhood, Baltimore Center Stage ignites conversations across Baltimore and beyond through the Mobile Unit, which brings high-quality theater to economically, culturally, and geographically diverse communities. The theater also nurtures the next generation of artists and theatergoers through the Young Playwrights Festival, Student Matinee Series, and many other educational programs for students, families, and educators.

### **About Mosaic Theater Company of DC**

Independent, intercultural, entertaining, and uncensored, Mosaic Theater Company of DC is committed to making transformational, socially-relevant art, producing plays by authors on the front lines of conflict zones, and building a fusion community to address some of the most pressing issues of our times. Dedicated to making our theater a model of diversity and inclusion at every strata, on stage and off, Mosaic invests in the new as we keep abreast of our changing and challenging times to ensure that our theater is a responsive gathering space, all the while nurturing and producing art of the highest order. For more information, visit <http://www.mosaictheater.org/>

## **SUPPORT**

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