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For Immediate Release:

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The Emperor Runs to his Past.

Rare O'Neill classic brings issues of revolution, race and colonialism into sharp and relevant contrast in haunting drama

Brutus Jones, an African American train porter and ex-con, has taken control of an island in the Caribbean. Setting himself up as an "Emperor" he takes advantage of the natives superstition and naivety to make himself rich.

But the native are tired of his tyrannical rule and rebel, forcing Jones to run for his life so he can get off the island to enjoy his spoils. Fleeing through the jungle night with the pounding of native drums growing louder and louder, Jones experiences haunting images of his and his race's past in Eugene O'Neill's masterpiece "The Emperor Jones."

"The Emperor Jones" opens March 4 and runs through March 27 at the Centre Theater, Norristown's professional theater at 208 DeKalb St. in downtown Norristown. Show times are 8 p.m. with Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$22 and can be purchased online at www.ticketleap.com. Call 610-279-1013 for information or visit the web at www.ironagetheatre.org

The rarely produced drama examines issues of spirituality, colonialism, madness and freedom. The play is particularly relevant today given the rebellions against dictatorships erupting throughout the world. "Even though the play was written in the early 20th century, the issues are the same ones people in Egypt are dealing with," said Director John Doyle. "Despots who have set themselves up as dictators, and what that does to the people of the country as well as the despot."

Iron Age Theatre's production of the play digs deeply into O'Neill's expressionistic style. A wildly theatrical play incorporating masks, live music, and intense physical movement as well as a dense, realistic bamboo jungle set and powerfully drawn characters, the play will be a thrill ride with Jones as he runs from the insurgents as well as the primal fear of his own ghosts.

A shivery whisper runs through this production as Jones finds the wall between human reason and animal instinct is far frailer than we like to pretend. This tin-pot emperor, forced to retreat into the jungle when his subjects rise up against him, is no sociological specimen. He becomes what we're all scared of turning into, when adrenaline floods us in moments of raw anger or terror.

"The Emperor Jones" features Kash Goins as Brutus Jones. Goins is one of the fastest rising stars in the Philadelphia region and the director of GOKASH productions. He is a writer,

director producer and innovator who spearheaded this fall's Philadelphia Urban Theatre Festival. He played John Henry in the Centre Theater's world premiere of "The Life of John Henry" by Chris Braak. Supporting Goins is Luke Moyer, who plays the Emperor's cynical British crony. Moyer, a Villanova University grad was last seen in the world premier of "Molumby's Million" and "The Rear Column" at The Centre Theater. Tiffany Joyner, Rich Bradford, Maurice Tucker round out the ensemble. Josh Camera who made his stage debut in The Rear Colum will also be par of the cast

Eugene O'Neill is considered the greatest American playwright. A multiple Pulitzer Prize winner, his dramas such as "The Iceman Cometh," "Desire Under the Elms," and "Long Days Journey Into Night" defined American theater and are still among the greatest plays written. "The Emperor Jones" was written in 1920 as a response to America's manipulation of events in Haiti. It was a hit on Broadway, launching O'Neill's professional career. The part of Jones is one of the great African American roles with Paul Robeson and James Earl Jones giving towering performances of the part. O'Neill's short, brutal play, challenges our perceptions of African American theatre. It is a white writer's vision but, historically, it was the first serious American play to encompass black experience.

"We have always wanted to produce this play and now, with Kash Goins, we feel we have found our Jones." Stated Randall Wise, co-artistic director of Iron Age Theatre

To support the production, Iron Age Theatre is posting a regular production blog. Actors, the directors, local experts on the issues of the play will share their thoughts on the rehearsal process, the themes of the play and background for the production. This resource will enhance the audience's experience making the play more than just an evening's performance. "It is a change to get into our imaginations," said Director Doyle.

Working together the Centre Theater and Iron Age Theatre have been one of the most critically acclaimed companies in the area for over fifteen years. The Philadelphia City Paper called the companies, *Norristown's Theatrical Treasure*. Receiving Barrymore nominations for a number of their productions the companies have also premiered seven plays in the past two years including "Citizen Paine," "Waiting for the Ship from Delos," "The Life of John Henry," Jeffrey Hatcher's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," "Empress of the Moon", "Molumby's Million" and most recently Chris Braak's "Red Emma" about anarchist Emma Goldman. The Centre's recent Independent Voices Festival presented 22 nights of theatre by 11 regional companies.

The Centre Theater is in the Montgomery County Cultural Center at 208 DeKalb Street in Norristown. It is easily reached via routes 202, I-76, I-476 and Ridge Pike. There is plenty of free parking and the theater is one block from Septa's Norristown Transit Center on the Manayunk/Norristown line.

Call 610-279-1013 for tickets and information or visit the web at www.ironagetheatre.org

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