



Richard Hopkins
Producing Artistic Director

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**ETHEL WATERS' COMPELLING VOICE RETURNS TO
FST'S MAINSTAGE AFTER 14 YEARS**

(Sarasota, FL) — Florida Studio Theatre proudly presents *Ethel Waters: His Eye is on the Sparrow* by Larry Parr, an inspiring musical biography celebrating the life and career of singer and actress Ethel Waters. Detailing Waters' inspiring journey from impoverished beginnings to Broadway and Hollywood stardom, this Mainstage production is a true rags-to-riches story and tribute to the resilience of the human spirit.

Ethel Waters: His Eye is on the Sparrow begins June 26 in FST's Keating Theatre, and is part of a three-show subscription package. Also included in the Summer Mainstage subscription package is the Off-Broadway hit musical *The Marvelous Wonderettes* and the Regional Premiere of the juicy comedy *The Cottage*. Subscriptions for all three Summer Mainstage shows can be purchased for as little as \$49, and single tickets for *Ethel Waters* range from \$29-39. Subscriptions and single tickets can be purchased at floridastudiotheatre.org or at (941) 366-9000.

"Witnessing Waters' journey as she overcomes hardships, poverty, and a deeply racist culture to become one of the country's most successful performers is inspiring," shared Kate Alexander, FST's Associate Director At-Large and the production's Director. "With music as her guide, Waters was able to fight the circumstances she was born into and achieve something great. This piece is a deep hero's journey. Ethel Waters is a true heroine."

Called "Captivating" by the *The Washington Post*, *Ethel Waters: His Eye is on the Sparrow* interweaves Waters' life story with her most well-known songs, like "Stormy Weather," "Sweet Georgia Brown," and "Am I Blue?" With perseverance and her unique voice, Waters escaped abject poverty and crossed racial barriers to become a legend. In the early 1920s, Waters was the highest paid African American recording artist, and in 1949, she became the second African American to be nominated for an Academy Award.

Florida Studio Theatre produced the World Premiere production of *Ethel Waters: His Eye is on the Sparrow* in 2005, receiving rave reviews from critics and audiences alike. "Audiences in FST's original production fell in love with Ethel's story," said playwright Larry Parr. "They were inspired by her ability to overcome not only external forces, like horrible racism and rejection, but also those challenging forces within her heart and mind. These are, perhaps, elements of our own selves, which we can also see in her. These relatable qualities make us wonder how we would have survived such a horrible, challenging beginning in our own lives."

Bringing the musical and theatrical icon to life is Sarasota favorite Jannie Jones, who also played Waters in FST's World Premiere production. "This piece touches a chord in me unlike any other. Larry [Parr] has written the perfect play that allows me to share my strengths as an actress and singer," shared Jones. "I hope to touch audiences' hearts and souls as I share Waters' unbelievable journey."

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Also returning to FST is Music Director Dr. Justin P. Cowan, who was last seen music-directing and on the piano in last summer's hit production of *Always...Patsy Cline*. "Ethel Waters is known as an incredible vocalist with roots firmly planted in the blues," said Cowan. "What made her a star was not her voice alone, but her gift of storytelling."

Ethel Waters: His Eye is on the Sparrow continues FST's 29th Summer Mainstage Season, and begins June 26 in FST's Keating Theatre. The production is part of a three-show subscription package, which also includes the Off-Broadway hit musical *The Marvelous Wonderettes* and the Regional Premiere of the juicy comedy *The Cottage*. Subscriptions for all three Summer Mainstage shows can be purchased for as little as \$49, and single tickets for *Ethel Waters* range from \$29-39. Subscriptions and single tickets can be purchased at floridastudiotheatre.org or at (941) 366-9000

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Known as Sarasota's Contemporary Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre was founded in 1973 by Artist, Jon Spelman. Starting out as a small touring company, FST traveled to places such as migrant camps and prisons. The company eventually settled down into a permanent home, acquiring the former Woman's Club building – now renamed the Keating Theatre. In the years that followed, Florida Studio Theatre established itself as a major force in American Theatre, presenting contemporary theatre in its five theatre venues: the Keating Theatre, the Goldstein Cabaret, the renovated Gompertz Theatre, the John C. Court Cabaret and Bowne's Lab Theatre.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to a broad-based audience. Under Producing Artistic Director and CEO, Richard Hopkins, FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. As FST grows and expands, it continues to provide audiences with challenging, contemporary drama and innovative programs.

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