



SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA NEWS RELEASE

Contact:

Jennifer Scott, Director of Marketing & Public Relations

843.720.1137 office | 702.510.4363 cell

jscott@spoletousa.org

Sherri Belfield, Director of University Communications & Marketing

704.378.1032 office

sbelfield@jcsu.edu

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Johnson C. Smith University Concert Choir to perform in landmark Spoleto Festival USA production of *Porgy and Bess* in 2016

**22-member Charlotte-based choir directed by Dr. Shawn-Allyce White to perform in the first
Spoleto Festival USA production of the opera by George Gershwin, DuBose and Dorothy
Heyward, and Ira Gershwin**

***Porgy and Bess* to be performed in Charleston's new Gaillard Performance Hall**

Visual design by internationally acclaimed artist Jonathan Green

Wells Fargo to be the presenting sponsor of *Porgy and Bess*

**The 40th season of Spoleto Festival USA to take place in Charleston, South Carolina May 27–
June 12; Full program details to be announced on January 3, 2016**

Tickets available in January 2016

September 30, 2015 (Charlotte, North Carolina)—General Director of Spoleto Festival USA Nigel Redden and Johnson C. Smith University President Ronald L. Carter today announced a partnership that will see the University's concert choir perform in a new production of opera *Porgy and Bess* during the 2016 festival, held in Charleston, South Carolina. The production will be sponsored by Wells Fargo as part of its focus on grants for funding arts, history, and culture.

A prominent part of the production, Johnson C. Smith University's Concert Choir will be on stage for much of the opera, recognized as the first great American opera and known for songs including "Summertime," "It Ain't Necessarily So," and "I Loves You, Porgy." The 1935 opera is based on the novel *Porgy* by DuBose Heyward and takes place in the author's home city of Charleston, where Spoleto Festival USA, a multi-genre international performing arts festival, has been held since 1977. Accentuating the opera's strong association with the city, the new production will be visually designed by Charleston artist Jonathan Green, whose vibrant depictions and knowledge of the region's Gullah culture is celebrated worldwide.

"*Porgy and Bess* has been hailed as one of the most successful American operas that continues to be performed throughout the world. One cannot help but be captivated by the power of Gershwin's music and I am delighted that the JCSU Concert Choir will have an opportunity to engage with this transformative work in the city that inspired its hero," said Choir Director Dr. Shawn-Allyce White.

Spoleto Festival USA's General Director Nigel Redden said the Festival's first production of a work so strongly associated with Charleston is a particularly fitting way to inaugurate the event's use of the city's Martha and John M. Rivers Performance Hall in the Gaillard Center, opening in October after a three-year renovation. "Thanks to the recommendation of Jay Everette, the Community Affairs Manager of the Wells Fargo Social Responsibility Group in Charlotte, we are delighted to have found in the JCSU Concert Choir the requisite talent to provide the choral heart of this new production. This is an opportunity for the singers' talents to be showcased at the Festival to a national and international audience."

Mr. Everette said when Wells Fargo was approached about underwriting the Festival's production of *Porgy and Bess*, the company's relationship with Johnson C. Smith University sparked the recommendation to consider the college's choir: "Wells Fargo has a strong history of support for both Spoleto Festival USA and JCSU, so the intersection between what both institutions do to educate and innovate in the arts was a natural connection."

Wells Fargo and its predecessor companies have been a major sponsor of Spoleto Festival USA since the first Festival in 1977. Mr. Redden said the company's generous underwriting of *Porgy and Bess* has ensured that the Festival can create a production that will truly celebrate the 40th Festival season and this longstanding relationship.

The 22 members of the JCSU Concert Choir will form the nucleus of the chorus and will be augmented by singers selected by nation-wide audition. The choir has prepared and performed opera chorus roles with professional companies in the past, including Opera Carolina's 2013 production of *Aida* and Adolphus Hailstork's opera *Rise for Freedom: The John P. Parker Story* in 2014. JCSU President Dr. Carter said that the partnership with Spoleto Festival USA provides the

choir with an exceptional opportunity to expand this professional experience: “At JCSU, we take pride in providing our students with a liberal arts education that also exposes them to distinctive experiences and allows them to connect with the wider community. Performing on the world stage as part of the renowned Spoleto Festival USA helps us to expand their global education in a most meaningful way.”

Choir Director Dr. White brings a rich history and experience with Gershwin’s famed opera to the production. At age four, Dr. White was a supernumerary in the Houston Grand Opera and Sherwin Goldman productions of *Porgy and Bess* performing internationally and on Broadway alongside her mother, Dr. Barbara Buck, whose voice teacher was Todd Duncan—the original Porgy, cast by Gershwin. Later, Dr. White auditioned for a spot in the chorus to travel to Germany and Amsterdam in a New York Harlem Theater production, but instead won the role of Bess. During this European tour, Dr. White met Anne Brown—the original Bess.

Artist and visual designer for *Porgy and Bess* Jonathan Green attended the partnership announcement and spoke about his vision for the production. Born and raised in the Lowcountry of South Carolina, Mr. Green’s work has been internationally recognized for capturing southern culture and traditions, particularly the Gullah culture of South Carolina’s Sea Islands, which retained ethnic traditions of West Africa.

“With *Porgy and Bess*, Charlestonian DuBose Heyward painted a distinctive and enduring portrait of Gullah life as lived by the residents of his fictional Catfish Row. As someone who shares this Gullah heritage, telling this story with an authentic Gullah voice is an exciting opportunity for me and one that I will use to reveal some of the lesser-known African traditions that are an integral part of Charleston’s history,” Mr. Green said.

Full details of the 40th season of Spoleto Festival USA will be announced on January 3, 2016. Tickets will be available in January 2016. The 2016 Festival takes place May 27 through June 12. To receive information about the 2016 season, including *Porgy and Bess*, and ticket information, sign up for the Spoleto Festival USA e-newsletter by creating an account at spoletousa.org.

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About Spoleto Festival USA

For 17 days and nights each spring, Spoleto Festival USA fills Charleston, South Carolina’s historic theaters, churches, and outdoor spaces with over 150 performances by world-renowned artists as well as emerging performers in opera, theater, dance, and chamber, symphonic, choral, and jazz music. For more information on Spoleto Festival USA 2016, May 27–June 12, please visit spoletousa.org or call 843.722.2764.

About Johnson C. Smith University

Founded in 1867, Johnson C. Smith University is an independent, close-knit urban university located in Charlotte, N.C. It has a growing national reputation for integrating the liberal arts with business, the sciences and technology in ways that empower tomorrow's diverse entrepreneurial citizens and leaders. Offering 23 fields of study, including a master's degree in social work, to more than 1,400 students from a variety of ethnic, socioeconomic and geographic backgrounds, the university's excellent academic programs focus on servant leadership, civic engagement and global responsibility. For more information about JCSU, visit www.jcsu.edu.

About Wells Fargo

Wells Fargo & Company (NYSE: WFC) is a nationwide, diversified, community-based financial services company with \$1.7 trillion in assets. Founded in 1852 and headquartered in San Francisco, Wells Fargo provides banking, insurance, investments, mortgage, and consumer and commercial finance through more than 8,700 locations, 12,500 ATMs, and the internet (wellsfargo.com) and mobile banking, and has offices in 36 countries to support customers who conduct business in the global economy. With approximately 266,000 team members, Wells Fargo serves one in three households in the United States. Wells Fargo & Company was ranked No. 30 on Fortune's 2015 rankings of America's largest corporations. In 2014, Wells Fargo donated \$281.2 million in grants to 17,100 nonprofits, and team members volunteered 1.74 million hours around the country. Wells Fargo's vision is to satisfy all our customers' financial needs and help them succeed financially. Wells Fargo perspectives are also available at [Wells Fargo Blogs](#) and [Wells Fargo Stories](#).