

PRESS RELEASE

# The Studio Theatre

THE STUDIO THEATRE. THE STUDIO 2NDSTAGE. THE STUDIO THEATRE ACTING CONSERVATORY. 1501 FOURTEENTH STREET, NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20005. WASHINGTON DC

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## PRESS RELEASE

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## THE STUDIO 2NDSTAGE SEASON ROCKS TO A CLOSE WITH TONY AWARD-WINNING MUSICAL *PASSING STRANGE!*

*“Smashes Broadway clichés with an electric guitar and the funniest libretto I can remember.”*  
—New York Magazine

### PASSING STRANGE

by **Stew and Heidi Rodewald**

Directed by **Keith Alan Baker and Victoria Joy Murray**

Music Direction by **Christopher Youstra**

Choreography by **Helanius Wilkins**

Starring: **Jahi A. Kears**

Featuring: **Aaron Reeder, Deidra LaWan Starnes and Jessica Frances Dukes.**

With: **Lulu N. Fall, S. Lewis Feemster, Courtney Gatson, Baye Harrell, Deborah Lubega, Sean Maurice Lynch, Juan Carlos Sanchez, Shaunté Tabb, Dereks Thomas, Natalie Tucker and Eric R. Williams.**

Opening July 14, 2010

In Stage 4

With soulful songs and funky harmonies, *Passing Strange* follows a rock musician on his quest for authenticity. From the mind of one-of-a-kind singer-songwriter and performance artist Stew, comes a new kind of musical full of sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll and unlike anything you’ve seen before.

Called “fresh, exuberant, bracingly inventive, bitingly funny, and full of heart,” by *The New York Times*, *Passing Strange* took Broadway by storm with its radical take on the traditional musical. The Tony Award winner for Best Book of a Musical, *Passing Strange* infuses an extraordinarily eclectic collection of music with a hilarious and heartfelt story. The Narrator (**Jahi A. Kears**), a rock musician and storyteller, brings the tale of his formative years to life. The Narrator’s alter-ego, Youth (**Aaron Reeder**), a young middle-class African American man from Los Angeles, leaves his church, his friends and his mother behind to take a chance on Europe. In this wild “musical experiment,” a sundry bunch of artists, anarchists, holy rollers, tokers and teens explore culture, race, sexual freedom, family bonds and the meaning of Art. The Youth’s nonstop journey across continents forces him to confront “the Real.” The cast collides with a live band to create an electric and unforgettable poetry slam meets rock concert meets stage musical.

In its first major revival since Broadway, *Passing Strange* will be directed by The Studio 2ndStage Artistic Director, **Keith Alan Baker**, director of such productions as *Fucking A*, *Jerry Springer: The Opera*, *Reefer Madness: The Musical!* and *Hair*. He will be joined by co-director **Victoria Joy Murray**, musical director **Christopher Youstra** and choreographer **Helanius Wilkins**. Creating the physical world of *Passing Strange* will be an all-star team of designers, including set designer **Giorgos Tsappas**, lighting designer **Justin Thomas**, projections and sound designer **Erik Trester** and costume designer **Kristopher Castle**.

Starring as the charismatic Narrator is **Jahi A. Kears**, returning to The Studio Theatre after playing Ogun Size in the hit play *In The Red and Brown Water*. He also starred in 2ndStage’s production of *Fucking A*, and The Studio Theatre’s *Topdog/Underdog* and *Slam!* Mr. Kears recently received a Helen Hayes nomination for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Resident Musical for his role in *Cool Papa’s Party* at Metro Stage.

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As Youth, **Aaron Reeder** will play the Narrator's younger self. Mr. Reeder returns to The Studio 2ndStage after performing in last season's *Fucking A*, as well as in *Jerry Springer: The Opera*. He has appeared in such productions as *Les Misérables* at Signature Theatre and *Sondheim: The Birthday Concert* at Avery Fisher Hall. Mr. Reeder has performed at Ford's Theatre, The John F. Kennedy Center, Landless Theatre Company and Imagination Stage.

**Deirdra LaWan Starnes**, who recently appeared in The Studio Theatre's *In the Red and Brown Water*, will play Mother. She also appeared in such Studio Theatre productions as *The Old Settler* and *Seven Guitars*. She was the 2009 Helen Hayes Award recipient for Outstanding Lead Actress for her turn in *Intimate Apparel* at African Continuum Theatre. She has performed at Olney Theatre Center, Theater J, Rep Stage, Imagination Stage and the Folger Theatre.

Playing Marianna is **Jessica Frances Dukes**. Ms. Dukes last performed at The Studio Theatre in *Caroline or Change* in 2006. She has appeared in *The Bluest Eye* with Theatre Alliance and *Spunk* at African Continuum Theatre Company, for which she received a Helen Hayes nomination, among others. She is also a company member at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, where she recently performed in *Antebellum*, *Eclipsed* and *Full Circle*.

This extraordinary ensemble includes **Deborah Lubega, Lulu N. Fall, S. Lewis Feemster, Courtney Gatson, Baye Harrell, Sean Maurice Lynch, Juan Carlos Sanchez, Shaunté Tabb, Dereks Thomas, Natalie Tucker** and **Eric R. Williams**.

*The 2009-2010 Season of The Studio 2ndStage is generously underwritten by A. Fenner Milton. This production of Passing Strange is underwritten by Donald T. and Nancy Bliss and by The Meredith Foundation.*

**Starring:** Jahi A. Kears (Narrator)

**Featuring:** Aaron Reeder (Youth), Deidra LaWan Starnes (Mother) and Jessica Frances Dukes (Marianna).

**With:** Lulu N. Fall, S. Lewis Feemster, Courtney Gatson, Baye Harrell, Deborah Lubega, Sean Maurice Lynch, Juan Carlos Sanchez, Shaunté Tabb, Derek Thomas, Natalie Tucker and Eric R. Williams.

**The Band:** Christopher Youstra (Piano), Kim Spath (Guitar), Yusef Chisolm (Bass) and Brian Gibson (Drums).

**Director and Designers:** Keith Alan Baker (Director), Victoria Joy Murray (Co-Director), Christopher Youstra (Musical Director), Helanius Wilkins (Choreographer), Kim James Bey (Dialects), Giorgos Tsappas (Setting), Justin Thomas (Lighting), Erik Trester (Sound/Projections) and Kristopher Castle (Costumes).

#### **PASSING STRANGE INFORMATION**

**Where:** Stage 4

**Dates:** July 14–August 8, 2010

**Performances:** Wednesday-Saturday: 8:30pm, Sunday: 7:30pm

**Ticket Prices:** Preview Prices: July 14, 15, 16: \$33, Wednesday-Friday and Sunday: \$38, Saturday Evenings \$43

**Press Opening:** Sunday, July 18, 2010

**Group Rates:** Discounts available for groups of 10 more tickets. Call 202-2327267 and ask for group sales.

#### **THE STUDIO 2NDSTAGE INFORMATION:**

The Studio 2ndStage creates edgy, extreme and electrifying productions that complement The Studio Theatre's season, all presented in its flexible raw space, Stage 4. *The Washington Post* proclaimed that 2ndStage "has long been a playground for... directors and actors (and, naturally, some of its riskier experiments)" and that a "convention-defying approach informs many 2ndStage offerings."

#### **DISCOUNTS**

**Student, senior citizen (62+) and military discount:** \$5 off (except Saturday evenings).

**Student Rush:** \$19 tickets for full-time students are available one-half hour before curtain on a seating available basis (except Saturday evenings).

**Groups:** for parties of 10 or more. Call the Group Sales Manager at 202-232-7267.

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**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Accessibility:** All performances are fully accessible to accommodate patrons with special needs. FM listening assistive system available. Call for schedule of sign-interpreted performances. Accessible seats available by reservation. Call the Box Office at 202-332-3300 or V/TTY 202-667-8436.

**Location:** 1501 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW (Northeast corner of 14th and P Streets).

**Parking:** Please call the Box Office for parking information.

**Metro Stops:** Red Line: Dupont Circle, Orange/Blue Lines: McPherson Square, and Green Line: U Street/Cardozo.

**Contact Information:** Tickets: 202-332-3300 V/TTY: 202-667-8436 Fax: 202-332-1187  
Administration: 202-232-7267 Admin. Fax: 202-588-5262

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