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TONY® AWARD-WINNER
LILLIAS WHITE
JOINS CAST OF BROADWAY'S

FELA!



PERFORMANCES BEGIN OCTOBER 19

**THE NEW MUSICAL BASED ON THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF ICONIC
AFRICAN COMPOSER & PERFORMER
FELA ANIKULAPO-KUTI
BOOK BY JIM LEWIS & BILL T. JONES
MUSIC & LYRICS BY FELA ANIKULAPO-KUTI
DIRECTED & CHOREOGRAPHED BY BILL T. JONES**

EUGENE O'NEILL THEATRE

FIRST PERFORMANCE: MONDAY, OCTOBER 19
OPENING NIGHT: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23

Tony® Award-winner **Lillias White** will join the cast of *Fela!*, the new Broadway musical based on the life and music of African composer and performer Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, playing the role of the iconic artist's mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. (Headshot of Ms. White can be found at www.FelaOnBroadway.com/epk.)

The critically acclaimed musical, which had sold-out crowds dancing in the aisles during its world premiere last summer at Off-Broadway's 37 Arts, will arrive on Broadway at the **Eugene O'Neill Theatre (230 West 49th Street)** on **Monday, October 19**. The official opening is set for **Monday, November 23**. *Fela!* is directed and choreographed by Tony[®] Award-winner **Bill T. Jones** (*Spring Awakening*), with a book by **Jim Lewis** and **Bill T. Jones**. The world renowned **Antibalas** and other members of the NYC Afrobeat community, under the direction of **Aaron Johnson**, will again perform Kuti's rousing music live onstage. Winner of this year's Lucille Lortel Award for Best Musical, *Fela!* was conceived by **Bill T. Jones, Jim Lewis** and **Stephen Hendel**.

Lillias White, a native New Yorker, began singing at a young age atop her Grandmother's dining room table. Since then she has performed at major venues around the world from New York to Singapore, L.A. to Sydney. An acclaimed actress and singer, Lillias has achieved success on Broadway in such hits as *Barnum, Dreamgirls, Cats, Once On This Island, How To Succeed In Business..., Chicago* and *The Life*, for which she won the Tony[®] Award, Drama Desk Award, Outer Critics Circle Award and Friends of New York award for her outstanding performance as "Sonia."

On film, Lillias can be seen with Katie Holmes in *Pieces Of April*, with Michael Keaton in *Game Six*, and you can catch a glimpse of her with Jim Carrey on the conga line in *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*.

Television credits include; "Sesame Street" (Emmy Award), "Law & Order: S.V.U.," "The Jury," "NYPD Blue," "PBS TV in Performance at the White House" with Leotyne Price, and most recently as Bloody Mary in the PBS "Great Performances" telecast of *South Pacific*.

Off-Broadway, Lillias was part of the original cast of *Crowns* (Audelco Award) and won an Obie Award for playing "Hennie" in William Finn's *Romance In Hard Times* at the Public. She was also seen in *The Princess And The Black-Eyed Pea* (San Diego Rep.), *The Best Is Yet To Come* (Rubicon Theatre), and *Waiting For Godot* (Cynthia Belgrave Th.).

Lillias can be heard singing background for Madonna ("Rescue Me") and as the voice of the Lead Muse in Disney's *Hercules* as well as "Effie Melody White" in the 25th anniversary concert recording of *Dreamgirls*. Her autobiographical recording *From Brooklyn to Broadway* is available online and coming soon is *The Jazz Album – Just Jazz*.

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In this revolutionary new musical, directed and choreographed by Tony[®] Award-winner **Bill T. Jones** with a book by **Jim Lewis**, audiences are welcomed into the extravagant, decadent and rebellious world of Afrobeat legend **Fela Anikulapo-Kuti**. Using his pioneering music (a blend of jazz, funk and African rhythm and harmonies), *Fela!* explores Kuti's controversial life as artist, political activist and revolutionary musician. Featuring many of Fela Kuti's most captivating songs and Bill T. Jones's imaginative staging, *Fela!* is a provocative hybrid of concert, dance and musical theater.

Fela! features scenic and costume design by **Marina Draghici**, lighting design by **Rob Wierzel**, sound design by **Rob Kaplowitz** and projection design by **Peter Nigrini**. Musical arrangements and additional music by **Aaron Johnson** and **Jordan McLean**, and **Jim Lewis** provided additional lyrics.

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THE CREATIVE TEAM

BILL T. JONES (Conceiver / Director / Choreographer / Book Writer) is the recipient of a 2007 Tony® Award, 2007 Obie Award, and 2006 Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation CALLAWAY Award for his choreography for *Spring Awakening*; the 2007 USA Eileen Harris Norton Fellowship; the 2006 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Choreography for *The Sever*; the 2005 Wexner Prize; the 2005 Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement; the Harlem Renaissance Award; the 2003 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize; and the 1994 MacArthur "Genius" Award. In 2000, The Dance Heritage Coalition named Mr. Jones "An Irreplaceable Dance Treasure." Mr. Jones choreographed and performed worldwide with his late partner, Arnie Zane, before forming the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in 1982. He has created more than 100 works for his company.

JIM LEWIS (Conceiver / Book Writer / Additional Lyrics) Broadway credits include *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (Tony®, Drama Desk Nominations), *Dangerous Games* (with Graciela Daniele), *Tango Apasionado*. Dance/Opera: Paul Dresher's *The Tyrant*; Ballet Hispanico's *Nightclub*; Philip Glass' *Les Enfants Terribles* (BAM); *PastFORWARD* (Mikhail Baryshnikov, BAM). Translations: Ionesco's *The Chairs*; Ibsen's *Lady From The Sea*. Dramaturge: *House Arrest* (Anna Deavere Smith); *Dream On Monkey Mountain* (Bill T. Jones); Art Spiegelman's *Drawn To Death*; *Dido And Aeneas* (Spoleto); Bill T. Jones 20th Anniversary *Still/Here* (BAM). Most recently: *This Beautiful City* with The Civilians, which had its NYC premiere in January at The Vineyard.

ANTIBALAS (Arrangements / Musicians) Credited with introducing Afrobeat to a new generation, this Brooklyn-based collective has released four critically-acclaimed albums since forming in 1998, and can be heard on numerous Afrobeat compilations. Antibalas has performed more than 700 concerts around the world including appearances at the Coachella, Newport and the Montreux Festivals.

RUTH & STEPHEN HENDEL (Co-Conceiver / Producer) Ruth's Broadway credits include: *Mary Stuart*, *33 Variations*, *In The Heights*, *Passing Strange*, *Legally Blonde*, *Kiki & Herb Alive on Broadway*, *High Fidelity*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *Caroline, Or Change*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Golda's Balcony*, *Frozen*, *'Night Mother*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Barefoot in the Park*, *Metamorphoses*. Off-Broadway: *Altar Boyz*, *Our Lady of 121st Street*, *The Exonerated*, *Red Light Winter*, *tick tick...Boom!*. Los Angeles: *As Much As You Can*. Ruth is on the boards of the LAByrith Theater, The Play Company and the Board of Advisors of the Yale School of Drama; She is vice-chair, and Stephen is Treasurer of the Eugene O'Neill Theater in Waterford, CT. Stephen also serves on the boards of The New Group, The Culture Project, Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane Dance Company and on the Board of Visitors of the Yale School of Music. Ruth and Stephen have a wonderful family and love them very much.

ROY GABAY (Producer / General Manager) Producing credits include: *The Little Dog Laughed*, *Metamorphoses*, *Frozen*, *A View From the Bridge* (Tony® Award); *How I Learned to Drive* (Pulitzer Prize); *Wit* (Pulitzer Prize); *Three Tall Women* (Pulitzer Prize). Upcoming: *Behind the Limelight*, *Cassandra's Angel*.

Fela!, a new musical, based on the life of groundbreaking African composer, performer and activist **Fela Anikulapo-Kuti**, moves to Broadway. Performances will begin on October 19 at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre (230 West 49th Street, between Broadway and 8th Avenue) with an official opening set for Monday, November 23. For more information about ***Fela!*** please visit www.FelaOnBroadway.com.

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti

Fela Ransome Kuti was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria, north of Lagos in 1938. His father was a Christian schoolmaster, minister and master pianist and his mother was a world-recognized feminist leader, who was very active in the anti-colonial Nigerian women's movement during the struggle for independence.

Fela was educated in Nigeria amongst the indigenous elite. Ironically, many of his classmates in his Nigerian school would become the very military leaders he so vociferously opposed.

With medical aspirations for their offspring (Fela's older brother, Koye, was to become a Deputy Director of the World Health Organization and his younger brother, Beko, President of the Nigerian Medical Association) in 1958 Fela's parents sent him to London for a medical education. Instead, he registered at Trinity College's school of music where he studied composition and chose the trumpet as his instrument. Quickly tiring of European composers, Fela, struck by Miles Davis and Frank Sinatra, formed the Koola Lobitos in 1961, and his band became a fixture in London's club scene. Two years later, Fela returned to Nigeria, restarted the Koola Lobitos, and became influenced by James Brown. Trying to find an authentic musical voice, he added elements of traditional Yoruba, high life and jazz, and "Afrobeat" was born. In 1969, Fela's Koola Lobitos traveled to Los Angeles to tour and record. During his eight months in the US, with LA as a home base, Fela befriended Sandra Isidore, who introduced him to the writings and politics of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver and other proponents of Black nationalism and Afrocentrism.

With this new politically explicit and critical worldview, Fela reformed the Koola Lobitos as Nigeria 70 and returned to Lagos. He founded a commune/recording studio called the Kalakuta Republic, complete with his own private nightclub, The Shrine, and Fela dropped his given middle name "Ransome," and replaced it with a Yoruba name "Anikulapo" (meaning "he who carries death in his pouch"). Playing constantly and recording at a ferocious pace, Fela and band (who were now called Africa 70) became huge stars in West Africa and beyond. His music served as a rallying cry for the disenfranchised, critiquing the military government, and made Fela not only a pop star but thrust him into political life. People took to the streets singing his songs and the military responded by viciously harassing Fela, jailing him and nearly killing him on several occasions.

In 1977, during a government-sanctioned attack on his Kalakuta Republic commune, Fela and other members of his commune were arrested; Fela himself suffered a fractured skull as well as other broken bones; a number of women living at Kalakuta were beaten and raped; and his 82-year old mother was thrown from an upstairs window, inflicting injuries that would later prove fatal. The soldiers set fire to the compound and prevented fire fighters from reaching the area. Fela's recording studio, all his master tapes and musical instruments and the only known copy of his self-financed film *Black President* were destroyed.

After the Kalakuta tragedy, Fela briefly lived in exile in Ghana, returning to Nigeria in 1978. A year later, he formed his own political party, MOP (Movement of the People) and ran for president in two elections, although his campaigning was consistently blocked by the military. As the '80s ended, Fela recorded blistering attacks against Nigeria's corrupt military government.

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was arrested more than two hundred times in his life, and charged with almost every conceivable crime, although only serving one eighteen month sentence in jail for a currency violation. Despite this constant harassment he continued to live in Nigeria even though, as an icon in the international world of rock and roll, soul, jazz and hip-hop, he could have at any point abandoned Nigeria and led the life of an international music superstar. His death on August 3, 1997 of complications from AIDS deeply affected musicians and fans internationally, as a unique and ineffable musical and sociopolitical voice was lost. In Nigeria one million people attended his funeral. His incredible body of work, almost 70 albums, is now available, through public demand, all over the world.