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FELA!

**THE NEW BROADWAY 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

PERFORMANCES BEGIN MONDAY, OCTOBER 19
OPENING NIGHT: MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23

As previously announced, *Fela!*, the new musical based on the life and music of groundbreaking African composer, performer and activist **Fela Anikulapo-Kuti**, will arrive on Broadway at the **Eugene O'Neill Theatre (230 West 49th Street)** where performances will commence on **Monday, October 19** with an official opening set for **Monday, November 23**. This new musical is directed and choreographed by Tony[®] Award-winner **Bill T. Jones** (*Spring Awakening*), with a book by **Jim Lewis** and **Bill T. Jones**. **Sahr Ngaujah** and **Kevin Mambo** will play the title character on alternate performances, while 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**. *Fela!* had its world premiere at Off-Broadway's 37 Arts in September 2008, where it enjoyed a sold-out limited run. Tickets for *Fela!* on Broadway are available through www.Telecharge.com or by calling (212) 239-6200. The Eugene O'Neill Box Office opens Monday, September 28 at 10am.

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! will feature a multi-cultural cast led by **Sahr Ngaujah** (recipient of an Obie Award for his performance in the title role Off-Broadway) and **Kevin Mambo** (MTC's *Ruined*), alternating in the role of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. **Lillias White** will play Funmilayo Ransome Kuti (Fela's mother) and **Saycon Sengbloh** (*Hair*) plays Sandra, Kuti's love interest. The company also includes **Corey Baker, Hettie Barnhill, Nicole Chantal DeWeever, Lauren Deveaux, Elasea Douglas, Rujeko Dumbutshena, Catherine Foster, Talu Green, Shaneeka Harrell, Abena Koomson, Ismael Kouyate, Gelan Lambert, Farai M. Malianga, Shakira Marshall, Afi McClendon, Adesola Osakalumi, Jeffrey Page, Daniel Soto, Jill M. Vallery, J.L. Williams, Iris Wilson, Aimee Graham Wodobode**. Scenic and costume design is by **Marina Draghici**, lighting design is by **Rob Wierzel**, sound design is by **Rob Kaplowitz** and projection design is by **Peter Nigrini**. Musical arrangements and additional music by **Aaron Johnson** and **Jordan McLean**, and **Jim Lewis** provided additional lyrics.

Fela! is produced by Stephen & Ruth Hendel, Roy Gabay, Edward Tyler Nahem, Chip Meyrelles/Ken Greiner and Daryl Roth/True Love Productions.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

BILL T. JONES (Conceiver / Director / Choreographer / Book Writer) is a 2007 Tony® Award winner and the recipient of the 2007 Obie Award and 2006 Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation CALLAWAY Award for his choreography for *Spring Awakening*, the recipient of the 2007 USA Eileen Harris Norton Fellowship, the 2006 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Choreography for *The Seven*, the 2005 Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award for Lifetime Achievement, the prestigious 2005 Wexner Prize, and the Aaron Davis Hall Harlem Renaissance Award. He is also a MacArthur "Genius" Award recipient in 1994, named one of America's Irreplaceable Dance Treasures by the Dance Heritage Coalition in 2000, and was awarded The 2003 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for which recipients are considered trailblazers who have redefined their art and reshaped the cultural landscape. He began his dance training at the State University of New York at Binghamton (SUNY), where he studied classical ballet and modern dance. After living in Amsterdam, Mr. Jones returned to SUNY, where he became co-founder of the American Dance Asylum in 1973. Before forming Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in 1982, Mr. Jones choreographed and performed nationally and internationally as a soloist and duet company with his late partner, Arnie Zane.

In addition to creating more than 100 works for his own company, Mr. Jones has received many commissions to create dances for modern and ballet companies including Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Axis Dance Company, Boston Ballet, Lyon Opera Ballet, Berkshire Ballet, Berlin Opera Ballet and Diversions Dance Company, and Dayton Contemporary Dance Company's The Flight Project. He has also received numerous commissions to create new works for his own company, including premieres for the American Dance Festival, the Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and for St. Luke's Chamber Orchestra. In 1995, Mr. Jones directed and performed in a collaborative work with Toni Morrison and Max Roach, *Degga*, commissioned by Lincoln Center's Serious Fun Festival and with Jessye Norman, *How! Do! We! Do!* which premiered at New York's City Center in 1999 as part of Lincoln Center's Great Performers New Visions series. *The Breathing Show*, Mr. Jones' evening long solo, toured for three years, and his second solo show, *As I Was Saying...*, toured for more than two. He has directed and choreographed for theatre and opera, most recently choreographing Off-Broadway for the New York Theatre Workshop's production of *The Seven* for which he was awarded the 2006 Lucille Lortel Award for Best Choreography and for the Broadway musical *Spring Awakening*.

Mr. Jones has received honorary doctorates from the Art Institute of Chicago, Bard College, Columbia College, the Juilliard School, Swarthmore College and Yales as well as the SUNY Binghamton Distinguished Alumni Award.

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), *This Beautiful City* with The Civilians (Vineyard Theatre).

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**, will begin performances 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.

FELA! Performance Schedule

October 19 – 24: Monday – Saturday at 8pm.

October 26 – November 22: Monday – Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 2pm & 8pm.

November 23 – 29: Monday at 6pm (opening night), Tues & Wed at 8pm, Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 2pm & 8pm, Sunday at 2pm & 7pm. NO performance Thursday, November 26.

Beginning November 31 the performance schedule will be as follows:

Tuesday at 7pm, Wednesday – Friday at 8pm, Saturday at 2pm & 8pm, Sunday at 2pm and 7pm.

Tickets range from \$27 – \$99 for previews (October 19 – November 21) and \$27 - \$122 post-opening (prices include a \$2 Jujamcyn Theatre facility fee). Tickets can be arranged through www.Telecharge.com or by calling (212). 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.