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**“TOO HOT TO HANDEL: THE JAZZ-GOSPEL MESSIAH”  
RETURNS TO THE AUDITORIUM THEATRE OF ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY  
WITH A ROUSING TRIBUTE TO THE REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.  
JANUARY 16 AND 17**

2010 Production to Feature Three Chicago-Based Soloists for the First Time:  
**Tenor Rodrick Dixon, Soprano Alfreda Burke and Alto Karen Marie Richardson**

CHICAGO — Brett Batterson, executive director of the Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University (ATRU), is pleased to announce that the beloved “Too Hot to Handel: The Jazz-Gospel Messiah” will return to Chicago’s National Historic Landmark Auditorium Theatre for a special tribute to the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. For two performances only, Saturday, Jan. 16 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Jan. 17 at 3 p.m., ATRU will be filled with the joyous sounds and exuberance of this jazz and gospel, All-American reinvention of Handel’s “Messiah.” Single tickets are now on sale and prices start at just \$30.

Since its 2006 Chicago debut at ATRU, “Too Hot to Handel” has continued to grow in popularity each year. Howard Reich of the Chicago Tribune raves, “Ingeniously reimaged to embrace black musical tradition, the aptly named Too Hot to Handel proved that even the most revered classical masterpieces can be taught to swing.”

Tenor **Rodrick Dixon** and Soprano **Alfreda Burke** will reprise their critically hailed performances for the fifth consecutive year, and new this year they will be joined by Alto **Karen Marie Richardson**, who last performed at ATRU for its intimate summer 2009 staging of the critically acclaimed “The Mistress Cycle.” Richardson replaces countertenor Victor Trent Cook, who has a scheduling conflict. For the first time, “Too Hot to Handel” will feature three Chicago-based soloists, and audiences will hear the show as it was originally written for a female voice (for mezzo-soprano rather than countertenor).

“The Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University is proud to support the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. through one of the jazziest, most swinging ‘Messiahs’ that our audience will ever hear,” said Batterson. “We are also excited that up-and-coming musical star Karen Marie Richardson joins ‘Too Hot’ veterans Rodrick Dixon and Alfreda Burke for an all-Chicago cast of soloists.”

“Too Hot to Handel” shapes George Frederic Handel’s beloved “Messiah” masterpiece into an active listening experience. Joining the soloists on stage are 200 additional musicians, including 150 voices of the city-wide Too Hot Choir (under the direction of Old St. Patrick’s Church’s **Bill Fraher**); a 50-piece symphony orchestra and a jazz ensemble under the baton of Conductor **Suzanne Mallare Acton**.

It was the sense of excitement in the “Hallelujah Chorus” that prompted Conductor **Marin Alsop** to suggest giving Handel’s “Messiah” a new twist. “Too Hot To Handel” grew from an idea to fruition in the hands of Alsop’s colleagues, Composers **Gary Anderson** and **Bob Christianson**, who originally created this jazz-gospel adaptation in 1992. Since then, this soulful work has uplifted audiences in cities throughout the United States.

Rodrick Dixon has performed several roles with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and appeared in Broadway’s “Ragtime,” as well as the revival of “Show Boat” at the Auditorium Theatre. In 2009 Dixon made his Los Angeles Philharmonic debut performing the role of Oedipus in Stravinsky’s “Oedipus Rex,” conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen and directed by Peter Sellars.

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Dixon also has toured nationally with his wife, soprano Alfreda Burke. Burke's credits include debuts with the Chicago Symphony at Ravinia under Erich Kunzel, the CSO's Symphony Center Inaugural Festival, Chicago Opera Theater, Grant Park Music Festival, and "Show Boat" at the Kennedy Center and the Auditorium Theatre. Burke has also worked in recordings, music video, television, radio, film and commercials.

Karen Marie Richardson has worked as a singer for more than 20 years, and has been featured in many musicals including "Ain't Misbehavin'," "Respect: A Musical Journey of Women" as well as ATRU's recent presentation of "The Mistress Cycle." A graduate of Millikin University, Richardson was a runner up in "Showtime At the Apollo On Tour" and is also an active composer who frequently performs original material.

#### **PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE**

The Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University proudly presents "Too Hot to Handel: The Jazz-Gospel Messiah" for two performances:

Saturday, Jan. 16 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Jan. 17 at 3 p.m.

Friday, Jan. 15 at 11 a.m.: One-hour dress rehearsal open to elementary through high school students (\$10 per student). The Auditorium Theatre's Student Matinee Series is sponsored by The Private Bank and The Robert Thomas Bobins Foundation.

#### **TICKET INFORMATION**

"Too Hot to Handel: The Jazz-Gospel Messiah" single tickets are now on sale, and range in price from \$30 - \$65. For single tickets, visit the Auditorium Theatre Box Office at 50 E. Congress Parkway; call Ticketmaster at (800) 982-ARTS (2787); or log on to [ticketmaster.com/auditorium](http://ticketmaster.com/auditorium).

Subscriptions for the Auditorium Theatre's 2009 – 2010 Season are now on sale. Subscribers to three or more shows receive 10% off full ticket prices. Discounted tickets are also currently available for groups of 10 or more. For subscription and group ticket information, call (312) 431-2357.

"Too Hot to Handel: The Jazz Gospel Messiah" is supported by Arrow Voyages, LLC and Friends of "Too Hot to Handel" chaired by N'Digo Publisher Hermene Hartman.

#### **FAMILY MATINEE SERIES**

The Auditorium Theatre's Family Matinee Series is designed specifically to awaken children's interest in live performance and plant the seed for developing an appreciation of the arts. This unique opportunity allows patrons to receive a free children's subscription with the purchase of a full-price adult subscription. This year's Family Matinee Series will introduce children to an eclectic mix of dance and music offerings including the Auditorium Theatre's annual "Too Hot to Handel: The Jazz-Gospel Messiah" (January 17), the colorful and exuberant Ballet Folklorico de Mexico de Amalia Hernandez (March 14) and innovative modern dance of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (March 27). Each family matinee performance is followed by a question and answer session with members of the shows' artistic teams. This interactive experience can dramatically change the impact of the performing arts on its viewers, and with the involvement of families it can also empower youth to express themselves.

#### **ABOUT THE AUDITORIUM THEATRE OF ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY**

The Auditorium Theatre of Roosevelt University, located at 50 E. Congress Parkway, is an independent, not-for-profit organization committed to presenting the finest in international, cultural and community programming to Chicago, and to the continued restoration and preservation of the National Historic Landmark Auditorium Theatre. The Auditorium Theatre is currently celebrating its 120th Anniversary, and a number of special events will be announced through September 2010. For more information about programming, volunteer and donor opportunities or theater tours, call (312) 922-2110 or visit [www.auditoriumtheatre.org](http://www.auditoriumtheatre.org).