



Virginia Arts Festival Announces

Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill

Anthony Mark Stockard, Director

Ashley Bishop-Diggs, Billie Holiday

Featuring the music and life of jazz legend Billie Holiday

In collaboration with Norfolk State University Theatre Company

October 29-31, 2021

Attucks Theatre, Norfolk

The play with music that entranced audiences on Broadway, on television, and in theatres across the country, is coming to Norfolk's historic Attucks Theatre: *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*. The time is 1959. The place is a seedy bar in Philadelphia. The audience is about to witness one of Billie Holiday's last performances, given four months before her death. More than a dozen musical numbers – including such classics as “Strange Fruit,” “God Bless the Child,” “Ain’t Nobody’s Business If I Do” and more – are interlaced with salty, often humorous, reminiscences to project a riveting portrait of the lady and her music, and her lifelong struggle with racism, abuse, and addiction.

The new production of Lanie Robertson’s play, staged by Norfolk State University Theatre Company and directed by Company Producing Artistic Director Anthony Mark Stockard, will feature Ashley Bishop-Diggs as Lady Day. Bishop-Diggs has won acclaim for her stage portrayal of Billie Holiday and will be making her Norfolk debut. The new production will commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Harlem Renaissance, a period associated with extraordinary intellectual, social, and artistic expression for African Americans.

In a nod to history, the performances of *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* will take place in the 102-year-old Attucks Theatre. Dubbed “the Apollo of the South,” the Attucks was once a major stop on the circuit of great Black musical stars in its heyday in the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s. Billie Holiday herself graced the Attucks stage, as did Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Sarah Vaughan, and many others, including two of Holiday’s own musical idols, jazz icon Louis Armstrong and blues pioneer Bessie Smith. Now the story of Holiday’s life, and the haunting sounds of her singular music, will once again fill the Attucks.

At one point in the play, Billie Holiday brings out her little dog onstage, and Virginia Arts Festival will audition dogs for the role. Persons interested in having their dogs “try out” for the role of Pepe, Holiday’s dog should visit vafest.org for more information.

Masks are required for audiences attending the performances. For complete information on Virginia Arts Festival’s COVID-19 health and safety policies, visit vafest.org.

Tickets for *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill* are on sale now online at vafest.org or by phone at 757-282-2822.

About the Virginia Arts Festival

Since 1997, the **Virginia Arts Festival** has transformed the cultural scene in southeastern Virginia, presenting great performers from around the world to local audiences and making this historic, recreation-rich region a cultural destination for visitors from across the United States and around the world. The Festival has presented numerous U.S. and regional premieres, and regularly commissions new works of music, dance, and theater from some of today's most influential composers, choreographers, and playwrights. The Festival's arts education programs reach tens of thousands of area schoolchildren each year through student matinees, in-school performances, artists' residencies, master classes and demonstrations.

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