Mississippi Museum of Art and Fish Tale Group Theatre present

Voices of Freedom Summer

Dramatic performance commemorates Mississippi Freedom Summer 1964

(Jackson, Miss) ... The Mississippi Museum of Art (the Museum) is pleased to partner with John Maxwell’s Fish Tale Group Theatre to host performances of Voices of Freedom Summer by Francis X. Kuhn commemorating the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer. From August 14 through 17, 2014, the Museum’s Trustmark Grand Hall will serve as the venue for this compelling drama that draws from historical accounts, newspaper articles, correspondence, speeches, songs, and archival materials from the 1960s.

Tickets for the following showtimes can be purchased online at www.fishtalegroup.org, or by calling the Fish Tale Group Theatre box office at 601-714-1414. Ticket prices: $15 in advance, $18 at the door; students $7 in advance, $10 at the door.

Showtimes:
Thursday, August 14 – 7:30 PM
Friday, August 15 – 7:30 PM
Saturday, August 16 – 2 PM and 7:30 PM
Sunday, August 17 – 2 PM and 7:30 PM
These performances are held in conjunction with current exhibitions at the Museum which include *This Light of Ours: Activist Photographers of the Civil Rights Movement* (on view through August 17, 2014). One of those activist photographers, Herbert Randall, is not only represented within the galleries but was also Director Francis X. Kuhn’s inspiration for *Voices of Freedom Summer*. Randall’s photographs ground the play visually in the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, and this authenticity is carried over into the script itself. “With the exception of explanatory narration, elisions, and two occasions where common nouns were substituted for proper names, the text is as it was written or spoken by those who participated in, or reported on, the events of Freedom Summer,” said Kuhn.

The piece was first produced with a combined cast of students and professionals in fall of 1999 at The University of Southern Mississippi, with support from the University’s College of the Arts, Honors Program, and Office of Research and Funding. It was subsequently performed the following year for an audience of Freedom Summer volunteers, and again in 2002 at a meeting of the Mississippi Historical Society. With funding from The University of Southern Mississippi, the Mississippi Historical Society, and The College at Brockport, Kuhn developed the drama for this production honoring the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer.

This summer’s performances in Jackson will be the first in more than a decade and will be the play’s most ambitious in terms of number of performances and professional cast members. The cast includes Prince Duren, Lauren Gunn, Sharon Miles, Jay Unger, and John Maxwell, among others. Music and set design are provided by Kevin Griffith.

**About the Cast:**

**Prince Duren** is a graduate of Jackson State University where he received a B.S. in Mass Communication. He received his MFA in Playwriting from the University of Arkansas, and currently is a Visiting Professor in the
Department of Speech Communication and Theatre at JSU. His other works include *Caught in the Net, Delta Secret, Dances With Football, A Rose Without Thorns,* and *A Family Affair.* His acting credits include *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, The Exonerated, Before It Hits Home, Bubbling Brown Sugar,* and *The Colored Museum,* among others. He most recently appeared in the New Stage Unframed series production of *Stick Fly.*

**Lauren Gunn** is a current resident of Jackson, Mississippi. She is a graduate of Mississippi College with a degree in International Studies. She has enjoyed being involved in the wonderful theatre community of Jackson since 2012 where she began as a professional acting intern at New Stage Theatre. Her credits include Kimber in *Stick Fly,* The American in *Nine Part's of Desire,* Mary in *Dublin Carol,* and Sally in *The Cat and the Hat.* She first met John Maxwell as a pupil in his acting class at New Stage. She feels privileged to now be a part of this production and working alongside the Fish Tale Group Theatre.

**Sharon Miles** received her theatrical training from The University of Southern Mississippi, and she currently serves as the Community and Creative Arts Director for Ekklesia Hattiesburg. In addition to her performances in productions such as *Hairspray, Miss Nelson is Missing, Once Upon a Mattress, Goodnight Moon,* and *The Miracle Worker,* she is also a writer, director, and all around supporter of the arts in Mississippi.

**Jay Unger,** a veteran of radio, television, stage, and film, is a graduate of Jackson State University and has also studied acting at H.B. Studios in New City, New York; and Actor’s Workshop with Beah Richards, and Bob Collier’s Commercial Voiceovers in New York City. His stage credits are voluminous, including *The Whipping Man, A Christmas Carol,* and *Driving Miss Daisy.* He has also performed in a number of productions at the Castillo Theatre in New York for the legendary New Federal Theatre.

**John Maxwell** is a renowned thespian, director, and theatrical figure in Mississippi and beyond. He holds a Masters Degree in Theatre from the University of Mississippi. His original work, “*Oh, Mr. Faulkner, Do You Write?*” began touring in 1981, and since that time, Maxwell has traveled and performed
a diverse selection of productions in twelve different countries and at locations all across the United States. He was awarded both writing and performance fellowships from the Mississippi Arts Commission, and in 2014, Maxwell received the prestigious Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. He is a member of the Actor's Equity and Screen Actors Guild and the founder of Fish Tale Group Theatre.

Francis X. Kuhn (Director) has directed for theatres and opera companies around the country. His theatre work includes work for New Stage Theatre, McCarter Theatre, Princeton Rep, Delaware Theatre Company, Warehouse Theatre, and numerous others. His production of Godspell for Muhlenberg Summer Music Theatre in Pennsylvania was named Best Professional Musical of 2011 by the Lehigh Valley Press; he was named Best Director of 2006 in the Denver Post's statewide Ovation Awards for his production of Sweeney Todd at Creede Repertory Theatre; and the New York Times praised his “engaging” and “lively” production of W.H. Smith's The Drunkard at New York's Metropolitan Playhouse. His most recent opera work was a staging of Handel’s Orlando for Sacramento Opera. He has also directed for Virginia Opera, OperaDelaware, and Opera Festival of New Jersey. He has served as artistic director for Allegheny Highlands Regional Theatre and producer for Gretna Theatre, as well as literary manager for Creede Repertory Theatre. He is delighted to be back in Mississippi, where he served on the faculty at The University of Southern Mississippi for eight years; and he is especially pleased to direct a revival of Voices of Freedom Summer, a work that means much to him. He is an associate professor of theatre at The College at Brockport (SUNY) in western New York. More information at www.frankxkuhn.com.

About John Maxwell's Fish Tale Group Theatre:

Fish Tale Group Theatre is a nonprofit that performs ministry through theatre productions. Compelling stories featuring drama, comedy, and everything in between engage audiences to consider deeper messages. With non-
compromising scripts, including original scripts by John Maxwell, Fish Tale Group Theatre explores in a frank, authentic way how the arena of religion and life's contemporary challenges intersect and intertwine. Through highly entertaining and compelling drama, an audience is engaged with stories that are edifying and thought provoking.

**About the Mississippi Museum of Art:**

The Mississippi Museum of Art’s mission is to “engage Mississippians in the visual arts.” The Museum is located at 380 South Lamar Street in Jackson. Museum hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 AM to 5 PM and Sunday, noon to 5 PM. The Museum is closed Monday. For more information about the Mississippi Museum of Art’s exhibitions, programs, and special events, please call 601-960-1515 or 1-866-VIEW ART (843-9278), or visit [www.msmuseumart.org](http://www.msmuseumart.org).

*This Light of Ours: Activist Photographers of the Civil Rights Movement* is organized by the Center for Documentary Expression and Art. Major support for the exhibition has been provided by the Bruce W. Bastian Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Local presentation of this exhibition is made possible through the generous support of AT&T, Jones Walker LLP, Wynne and Bill Seemann, Foundation for the Mid South, Mississippi Power, Jackson Convention & Visitors Bureau, Leslie Hurst, *The Clarion-Ledger* Media Group, and Regions.

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