Cleveland Play House to Heat Up February with *The Devil’s Music*

Acclaimed Performer Miche Braden Stars in Bessie Smith Musical

**February 15 – March 10, 2013**

Opening Night: February 20, 2013

*Calendar Editors: See Fact Sheet for Performance Schedule and Special Events*

CLEVELAND, OH (January 22, 2013) – After breaking box office records in the summer of 2012 with *One Night With Janis Joplin*, Cleveland Play House keeps right on rocking and resurrects The Empress of Blues in *The Devil’s Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith*. Singer/actor/musician Miche Braden, nominated for a 2012 Drama Desk Award for the role, brings the defiant energy and musical brilliance of this Red Hot Mamma to life on the stage in this soulful musical. The Cleveland Play House production of *The Devil’s Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith*, conceived and directed by Joe Brancato, is running in the Allen Theatre at PlayhouseSquare starting Friday, February 15 through Sunday, March 10, 2013. Tickets are available by calling 216-241-6000 or online at www.clevelandplayhouse.com. *The Devil’s Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith* is sponsored by Kulas Foundation and is produced with support from Cuyahoga Arts and Culture and the Ohio Arts Council.

“The Devil’s Music was written around Miche Braden’s extraordinary talents,” says CPH Artistic Director Michael Bloom. “I can’t wait for Cleveland audiences to experience a performance that has garnered plaudits Off Broadway and at the Montreal Jazz Festival.”

**ABOUT THE PLAY**

Sexy and racy, blues singer Bessie Smith was the definition of a Red Hot Mamma and the most successful entertainer of her time. On the eve of her tragic death in 1937, Bessie takes center stage in *The Devil’s Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith* and tells the story of her amazing life and career, her loves and losses. Put your troubles aside and soak up the blues as Bessie Smith comes to life and sings the songs that made her so unforgettable, including “St. Louis Blues,” “Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl,” and “Nobody Knows You When You’re Down and Out.”

*The Devil’s Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith* had its world premiere at Penguin Rep Theatre (Joe Brancato, Artistic Director and Andrew Horn, Executive Director) and was then produced off-Broadway at St. Luke’s Theatre by Penguin Rep Theatre and Edmund Gaynes in association with Lizanne and Don Mitchell.

The daughter of a preacher, Bessie Smith overcame Southern poverty to become the greatest and most influential classic blues singer of the 1920s, earning the honorific title “Empress of the Blues.” Her turbulent life encompassed a troubled childhood, a flamboyant lifestyle and stormy marriage, and a fickle public that eventually turned its back on the blues in favor of swing. Despite all this, Bessie, an immensely talented but hard-drinking, lusty, and volatile woman, was almost single-handedly responsible for thrusting African-
American-Southern blues into mainstream music. Among the songs she made famous are “I Ain’t Got Nobody,” “St. Louis Blues,” “Baby Doll,” “Gimme a Pigfoot,” and “Tain’t Nobody’s Bizness If I Do.” Though the record industry was still in its early years, Bessie made over 160 recordings and, at the height of her popularity, she sold more recordings than anyone other than Caruso and Al Jolson. Over the decades, stars such as Ethel Waters, Mahalia Jackson, Billie Holiday, and Janis Joplin have acknowledged their debt to Bessie’s groundbreaking work. In 1980, Bessie Smith was inducted into the Blues Foundation’s Hall of Fame and, in 1989, into The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

THE DEVIL’S MUSIC Cast

MICHE BRADEN (Bessie Smith/Music Director/Music Arrangements) last appeared in Cleveland in Love Langston for Great Lakes Theater. She just portrayed Mammy in the world premiere of Gone with the Wind at Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre in Winnipeg, Canada after successful runs of The Devil’s Music in New York City and Montreal’s International Jazz Festival. Ms. Miche (pronounced “Mickey”) originally hails from Detroit where she was artist-in-residence with Detroit’s Council of the Arts and was founder and lead singer of the women’s jazz band Straight Ahead. Music director/arranger/acting credits include The People’s Temple, Gee’s Bend, The Bluest Eye, Mahalia: A Gospel Musical, Lady Day at Emerson’s Bar & Grill, Hot Snow: The Story of Valaida Snow, and Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom. She originated the role Duchess DeLovely in Hats: The Red Hat Society Musical. She has sung with Regina Carter, Alexis P. Suter, Milt Hinton, Lionel Hampton, Frenchie Davis, and James Carter – at Carnegie Hall and in Carter’s releases Gardenias for Lady Day and At the Crossroads. She performed on Broadway in the finale of Movin’ Out, and Fox 5 News dubbed her “Billy Joel’s Piano Woman.” She was the featured singer in Damien Foundation’s 2007 Gospel for Life tour in Belgium and France and is a recurring featured artist in Absolute Gospel Festival, Lyon, France. She toured Japan in numerous jazz and gospel concerts. She is minister of music and head of the Creative Arts Ministry at Unity Fellowship Church, Newark, New Jersey. Honors include Drama Desk, Lucille Lortel, Off Broadway Alliance, Audelco, Carbonell and Connecticut Critics Award nominations. Her album Diva Out of Bounds, Ms. Miche is available from iTunes.

GEORGE CALDWELL (Piano) returns to Cleveland Play House after appearing as musical director of Ella in 2007. He has conducted Black and Blue and Play On! on Broadway; played piano and keyboards for Broadway productions Bring In ’Da Noise and The Full Monty; and conducted tours of Body and Soul and Black and Blue in Europe; as well as serving as musical director for United States regional co-productions of original musicals Ella, Thunder Knocking on The Door, Cookin’ At The Cookery, and a run of Golden Boy at Long Wharf Theatre. He toured the world as pianist in The Count Basie Orchestra for seven years (garnering a Grammy Award in 1996) and in The Duke Ellington Orchestra for three years. He has performed with many and diverse artists: such as George Benson, Elvis Costello, Bobby McFerrin et al. Visit www.georgecaldwelljazz.com for more professional credits.

JIM HANKINS (“Pickle”/Bass) grew up in a Detroit neighborhood that produced many internationally known jazz and R&B musicians, including jazz icon Barry Harris, saxophonist Charles McPherson, and Richard Street and Melvin Franklin of The Temptations. Self-taught as a bassist, Hankins was mentored by jazz greats Paul Chambers, Doug Watkins, Will Davis, and Harold McKinney, which enabled him to share the stage with legendary artists such as Lou Rawls, Irene Reid, Arthur Prysock, Freda Payne, Donald Byrd, Wes Montgomery, Sonny Stitt, and Betty Carter. At age 16, Hankins (playing trombone) along with saxophonist Charles McPherson and trumpeter Lonnie Hillyer, was invited to sit in with Miles Davis’ sextet. This session was the highlight of Hankins’ musical life. In the late 60’s he attended business school and accepted a job with a major corporation. He returned to full-time performing upon retirement and has since traveled the world as a musician. He takes pride in having been with The Devil’s Music from the beginning.

KEITH LOFTIS (Saxophone) has been described as one of the most dynamic jazz saxophonists of today. A graduate of Booker T. Washington High School of the Visual and Performing Arts, Loftis received his Bachelor
of Arts, Music from The New School for Social Research and his masters in Composition/Film Scoring from New York University. He has since performed with jazz legends, including Benny Carter, Cedar Walton, Nancy Wilson, Frank Foster, Alvin Batiste and Ray Charles. Loftis appears regularly throughout Europe, Asia and parts of the Middle East. He currently performs with Michael Carvin, the Roy Hargrove Big Band, and Abdullah Ibrahim. Other credits include VH1’s “Fashion Rocks” with Mary J. Blige and Usher and “Storyteller” again with Mary J. Blige. Loftis performs often at New York’s renowned Carlyle hotel. He continues film scoring and has played music in films Three Can Play That Game and Black Out. His CD Simply Loftis was released in 2011. See www.keithloftis.com.

For actor headshots, please go to http://www.clevelandplayhouse.com/main-stage/2012-2013/the-devils-music

THE DEVIL’S MUSIC Creative Team

ANGELO PARRA (Playwright) is an award-winner, with plays produced in New York; Los Angeles; Chicago; Washington, D.C.; at Hartford Stage; Florida Stage; Cape (Cod) Playhouse; George Street Playhouse; Theatre Memphis; Passage Theatre; Florida Repertory Theatre; Penguin Rep; and elsewhere. Last summer The Devil’s Music was invited to give six performances at The Montreal International Jazz Festival, the only play ever invited to this renowned music festival. Among his plays is Journey of the Heart – dramatizing the seesaw struggle of a hospital committee to decide who gets a heart for transplant – which won the Jewel Box Theatre, Mixed Blood Versus America, and David James Ellis Memorial awards. Parra received a Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions grant (National Endowment for the Arts, U.S. Information Agency, Rockefeller Foundation, and Pew Charitable Trusts) to sponsor two of his plays at the 1993 Edinburgh International Theatre Festival. Honors include two New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) Scriptwriting Fellowships and the 1998 Chicano/Latino Literary Award for his play Song of the Coquí. In 2000, he was named a Tennessee Williams Scholar at the prestigious Sewanee Writers Conference. He is a Dramatists Guild member and alumnus of the BMI/Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop. In 2008, Parra was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Landmarks of American History and Culture grant. He is the founder/director of the Hudson Valley Professional Playwrights Lab, playwriting instructor at SUNY Rockland Community College, president of the Board of Penguin Rep Theatre, and author of Playwriting for Dummies.

JOE BRANCATO (Director) was cited by The New York Times as “one of America’s most insightful directors.” Off-Broadway includes The Devil’s Music: The Life & Blues of Bessie Smith (Drama Desk, Lucille Lortel, Off Broadway Alliance, and Audelco Award nominee); Tom Dudzick’s Miracle on South Division Street, St. Luke’s Theatre; Fall to Earth and Freed (Audelco Award nominee) at 59E59; Tryst (Outer Critics nomination, Best Play); Cobb (Drama Desk winner) produced by Kevin Spacey in New York City and Los Angeles; From Door To Door, Westside Theatre; One Shot, One Kill, Primary Stages; Jeffrey Solomon's Santa Claus is Coming Out; Two and a Half Jews; My Italy Story; Ricky Ian Gordon's The Matter of Minutes; Escape from Happiness (starring Marsha Mason), The Big Swing (starring Madeline Kahn, Sarah Jessica Parker, Matthew Broderick, Marisa Tomei), and Dr. Valentine’s Waltz (starring John Turturro, Laura Linney, Gina Gershon, Jane Alexander) at Naked Angels; and Hold the Wedding, produced by Joseph Papp. Regional credits include George Street Playhouse, Seattle Repertory Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Alley Theatre, Hartford Stage, Westport Country Playhouse, Capital Rep, New Rep, Hartford TheaterWorks, Cape Playhouse, Passage Theatre, and Florida Stage. He is founding artistic director of Penguin Rep and has directed numerous productions there, including many premieres. He commissioned and directed The Man Who Was Peter Pan, the basis for Oscar-nominated film Finding Neverland. As playwright he wrote Drop Dead Perfect and the book for the musical Mae West at the Club El Fey. Honors include LAScene Best Director; two Rockland County Executive Awards, Artistic Excellence; and Best Director and Best Production IRNE nominations, Tryst at Merrimack Rep.
The design team for *The Devil’s Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith* includes Michael Schweikardt (Scenic Design), Todd Wren (Lighting Design), Patricia Doherty (Costume Design), and James C. Swonger (Sound Design). Also on the team: Jennifer Collins (Stage Manager), Faye Carter (Assistant Stage Manager).

For complete bios, please go to [http://www.clevelandplayhouse.com/main-stage/2012-2013/the-devils-music](http://www.clevelandplayhouse.com/main-stage/2012-2013/the-devils-music)

**TICKET INFORMATION**

Single tickets are on sale now; prices range from $49 to $69. Tickets are $15 for currently enrolled students under age 25 with valid ID. For single tickets, please call 216-241-6000 or go online at www.clevelandplayhouse.com. Groups of 10+ save up to 40% off single ticket prices; call 216-400-7027 or email cwheeler@clevelandplayhouse.com.

Founded in 1915, Cleveland Play House is America’s first professional regional theatre. Throughout its rich history, Cleveland Play House has remained dedicated to its mission to inspire, stimulate and entertain diverse audiences in Northeast Ohio by producing plays and theatre education programs of the highest professional standards. It has produced more than 100 world and/or American premieres, and over its long history more than 12 million people have attended over 1,300 CPH productions. Today, under the leadership of Artistic Director Michael Bloom and Managing Director Kevin Moore, Cleveland Play House looks toward its centennial while performing in three state-of-the-art venues at PlayhouseSquare in downtown Cleveland.

Cleveland Play House is funded through the generosity of Cuyahoga County residents through Cuyahoga Arts and Culture, and The Ohio Arts Council helps to fund Cleveland Play House with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans.
FACT SHEET

WHAT: The Devil’s Music: The Life and Blues of Bessie Smith
Written by Angelo Parra
Conceived and directed by Joe Brancato
Musical direction and performance by Miche Braden

SYNOPSIS: This soulful musical transports you to the 1930s and a private parlor in Memphis, where sexy and sassy Bessie Smith takes center stage. Don’t miss the amazing life and career, the loves and losses, and the great songs that made her “The Empress of the Blues.”

WHERE: Allen Theatre, PlayhouseSquare, 1407 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio

WHEN: Preview Performances: Fri 2/15, Sat 2/16, Sun 2/17, Tue 2/19
Opening Night: Wednesday, February 20, 2013
Final Performance: Sunday, March 10, 2013
Tuesday Evenings 7:00 pm
Wednesday - Saturday Evenings 7:30 pm
Saturday and Sunday Matinees 2:30 pm
Weekday Matinee 1:30pm, Thu 2/28

Special Events

- InsideCPH: “Selling a Song” – Monday, 2/25/13 @ 6:30pm – In the shower you can just sing a song, but on stage you have to sell it! Join guest artists from The Devil’s Music to find out what it takes for a musical performance to hit the right note. Event is FREE but please e-mail InsideCPH@clevelandplayhouse.com with questions or to RSVP.

- Pre-show Conversations – 45 minutes before every production. Led by CPH actors and staff, these interactive half-hour conversations pull back the curtain early to let you connect with the people, themes, ideas and creative choices that go into each production, in an engaging and relaxed setting.

- Post-show Discussions – Sunday, 2/24; Tuesday, 2/26; Sunday, 3/3, 2013 A chance to interact with the cast, creative team, local experts and fellow playgoers in a lively and wide-ranging discussion of each production and the questions it raises.

Prices
Regular ticket prices range from $49 to $69, with discounts available for groups of ten or more. Tickets are $15 for all students under the age of 25. For Single Tickets: Call (216) 241-6000, or visit www.clevelandplayhouse.com. Groups of 10 of more: Call Cosandra Wheeler, (216) 400-7027.