

**PORGY AND BESS WILL BE A CENTERPIECE OF  
TENTH SEASON CELEBRATION OF  
THE MURPHY FINE ARTS CENTER**

Classic American Opera to be Performed  
at the “Home” of Acclaimed Opera Stars  
Including Gershwin’s Original “Bess”

For Immediate Release

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Baltimore, MD — [The Morgan State University Opera Workshop \(MSUOW\)](#) Vincent Dion Stringer, [Artistic Director](#) is pleased to announce **Kevin Short, Kishna Davis, and Lester Lynch** are joining the MSUOW to play Porgy, Bess, and Sportin' Life in the [MSUOW's new](#) production of *Porgy and Bess*. Performances will begin March 29, 2012 running through April 1, 2012 at the Murphy Fine Arts Center, on the campus of Morgan State University in Baltimore. Further casting will be announced at a later date.

This production of *Porgy and Bess* at Morgan State has special significance because: 1) **Anne Brown**, the Baltimore native who *originated the role of “Bess,”* was trained at [what was then] **Morgan College**. Her penetratingly pure soprano voice and her muse inspired George Gershwin to expand the relatively minor role of Bess in a folk opera that he originally called “Porgy.” As a result, Bess “grew” from a secondary character (as in the original version); and in 1935 “Porgy and Bess” took American theater by storm with Miss Brown in the title role. 2) The primary roles of Porgy, Bess, and Crown for this production are portrayed by celebrated Morgan State University alumni and guest artists: **Kevin Short, Kishna Davis, Lester Lynch and Larry Hylton**, respectively. 3) The opera will be presented in the **Gilliam Concert Hall** of the Carl J. Murphy Fine Arts Center—which is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> Season. 4) It brings full-circle the legacy of talent and training that is the hallmark of the Morgan State University Department of Fine and Performing Arts.

Gershwin's seminal American opera *Porgy and Bess* is being staged and directed by award-winning actress, dancer, and Tony Award nominated choreographer, and history-making director, **Hope Clarke**. Ms. Clarke joined the production when she learned of the talented cast that has been assembled for this very special production. The artistic and creative teams were assembled to highlight the **10<sup>th</sup> Season Celebration** of the Murphy Fine Arts Center. The team also includes music director, **Maestro Julien Benichou**, music director of the Mid-Atlantic Symphony Orchestra.

**Kevin Short** is a versatile bass-baritone has sung the title role of Porgy in *Porgy and Bess* with the Washington National Opera in 2005-2006 and with the Los Angeles Opera in 2006-2007. Among the numerous opera companies with which Kevin as performed in North America are multiple roles with the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Washington Opera, Seattle Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Canadian Opera Company, Vancouver Opera, Edmonton Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Sarasota Opera, Opera Pacific, Lyric Opera of Kansas City, Indianapolis Opera, and the Utah Symphony. In Europe, he has performed with numerous Opera companies. He enjoys a very active concert schedule and has worked with important orchestras in the U.S. and around the world including the Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony, National Symphony, Baltimore Symphony,

Detroit Symphony, the New York Pops Orchestra, and the Opera Orchestra of New York. He was educated at Morgan State University and the Curtis Institute of Music, M.M., and the Juilliard School of Music Opera Center.

**Kishna Davis**, soprano, is widely acclaimed throughout the United States and Europe for her performances in opera, as a solo concert artist and is celebrated in her signature role of “Bess” in *Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess*. In 2010, she performed the title role for the *Porgy & Bess 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tour* and at the Gershwin Gala with the Cleveland Pops. Other performances as “Bess” include New York City Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Indianapolis Opera, Virginia Opera, San Francisco National Symphony, Cleveland, Berlin, Rome, Prague Czech Republic Symphonies. Most recently, she performed the title role of *Aida* with Memphis Opera that opened their 2010-11 season. Other operatic roles include: Sister Rose in *Dead Man Walking* (Baltimore Opera), Nedda in Leoncavallo’s *I Pagliacci* (Opera Memphis), the title role in Puccini’s *Tosca* (Metro Lyric Opera of New Jersey), Norina in Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* (Indianapolis Opera), Musetta in Puccini’s *La Bohème* (Metro Lyric Opera, Connecticut Grand Opera), the title role in Verdi’s *Aida* (Metro Lyric Opera), Medoro in Handel’s *Orlando*, and concert scenes from Verdi’s *La forza del destino* and Dvorák’s *Rusalka*, Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* (Western Opera Theatre). She holds degrees from Morgan State University and the Juilliard School of Music Opera Center.

**Hope Clarke**, an award-winning, actress, dancer, vocalist, choreographer and director has a long, celebrated career on stage, in film and on television (1970s-1980s); as choreographer and director (1980s – . She made history when she became the first African American—and first African American woman—to direct and choreograph a major production of *Porgy and Bess*. Miss Clarke’s production of *Porgy and Bess* was staged in commemoration of the work’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary; and it toured major U.S. cities and major cities in Japan and Europe. Miss Clarke drew critical acclaim for her commitment to staging the show as a monument to African American community and pride.. Miss Clarke’s storied career has included her positions as principal dancer with both the Katherine Dunham Company and the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater. She has appeared in guest roles on numerous television shows including *The Jeffersons*, *Hill Street Blues*, *Three’s Company*, *Law and Order* and *As the World Turns*. Her Broadway credits include *Don’t Bother Me I Can’t Cope*, *Purlie*, *Hallelujah Baby* and the NBC-TV miniseries, *King*. She has been a sought-after choreographer; and her work has been the centerpiece of numerous productions including *Caroline, or Change*, *A Free Man of Color*, *ShowBusiness: The Road to Broadway*, *The Tempest* and *Jelly’s Last Jam*—for which she was nominated for a **Tony Award** and a **Drama Desk Award**.

**Julien Benichou**, is an accomplished conductor who is Music Director of the Mid-Atlantic Symphony—based in Annapolis, Maryland. Mo. Benichou founded and directed the Montpellier Young Orchestral Ensemble in France. He has also been music director of several choral groups such as the Martigues Choir in Martigues, France. His other assignments include Mo. Benichou was an assistant conductor with the Hopkins Symphony, the Columbia Orchestra, The Peabody Singers, The Baltimore Opera Company, The Skokie Valley Symphony Orchestra, and associate conductor of the Hot Springs Music Festival in Arkansas. He was also the director of the Pre-College Chamber orchestra at the Juilliard School. He is a regular guest conductor for Towson New Music at Towson University.

**Porgy and Bess** begins performances on March 29, 2012 with a matinee and continues with evening performances March 30-April 1, 2012. Tickets (\$25-\$60) go on sale for this production on Oct 1, 2011 at the Murphy Fine Arts Center ticket office and through Ticketmaster (charge-by-phone, ticketmaster.com and all Ticketmaster outlets). For further information call 443-885-4440 or visit <http://www.murphyfineartscenter.org>

The Murphy Fine Arts Center, located at 2201 Argonne Drive in Baltimore is accessible to persons with special needs and to those requiring wheelchair seating or first-floor restrooms. Assistive listening devices are available up request.