

For Immediate Release

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**AMERICAN PREMIERE OF JÉRÔME SAVARY'S FRENCH MUSICAL REVUE
"LOOKING FOR JOSEPHINE"
AT PEAK PERFORMANCES@MONTCLAIR, SEPTEMBER 17-20, 24-27**

Nicknamed the Black Venus, Josephine Baker, one of the United States's most glamorous and legendary expats, is the dramatic subject of "Looking for Josephine," a wildly splashy musical revue, which after opening at Paris's L'Opéra Comique in 2006 and playing to over 200 sold-out houses was seen in theaters throughout Europe before returning to Paris twice more, where it was once again greeted with standing-room-only crowds. Directed by Jérôme Savary and starring American musical artist Nicolle Rochelle, plus a cast of 22 Cuban, Chilean, French and American dancers, actors, tappers, singers and musicians, "Looking for Josephine" makes its American debut at Peak Performances@Montclair, September 17-27.

"Looking for Josephine," part celebration of Baker's charm, erotic wit and courage, and part tribute to African American musical genius, traces American music and dance from its roots in Africa, Haiti, and Cuba through a weaving of American traditional blues, jazz and boogie-woogie, tap, lindy and salsa. The musical's plot is based on a fictional story of a French producer, who travels to post-Katrina New Orleans in 2005 in search of performers for a musical that would revive the genius of Josephine Baker and "La Revue Nègre," the 1925 show at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées that made Baker the toast of Paris.

JOSEPHINE BAKER was born Freda Josephine McDonald on June 3, 1906 in St. Louis, Missouri. At age 13, she toured the United States with The Jones Family Band and The Dixie Steppers. Although a talented singer and dancer, as an African American she was restricted to comedic roles. In 1925, frustrated by racial discrimination in the U.S., Baker left

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for Paris where she became an overnight sensation dancing in “La Revue Nègre.” This was followed by a starring role in “La Folies du Jour” at the Folies-Bergère, where she danced topless in the famous banana-skirt costume that cemented her celebrity status. By 1927, she was the highest paid entertainer in Europe, and in the early 1930s, she starred in the films *Zou-Zou* and *Princess Tam-Tam*. Her commitment to human rights is well known. She was awarded the Medal of the Resistance with Rosette and named a Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur by the French government for her efforts serving France during World War II. In the U.S., the NAACP named May 20th Josephine Baker Day in honor of her ongoing civil rights activism. Baker’s humanitarian spirit extended to adopting twelve children, famously known as the “Rainbow Tribe,” who she raised with her fourth husband, French orchestra leader Jo Bouillon. In 1973, Baker returned to New York to perform at Carnegie Hall where she was finally greeted with standing ovations in her own country. In 1975, four days before her death, she gave her final performance at the Bobino Theater in Paris. The reviews were among the best in her career.

Unlike Baker, **NICOLLE ROCHELLE**’s gifts were celebrated early on. As a young child growing up in New Jersey, she was in the PBS series “Shining Time Station” and the HBO/Disney series, “The Babysitters Club.” Other television appearances include recurring roles on “The Cosby Show” and “Clarissa Explains It All,” as well as on “Law and Order,” “NYPD Blue” and “Third Watch.” She has performed in stage productions at New York’s Second Stage Theatre, The Variety Arts Theatre and the Nederlander Theatre, as well as productions in Washington, DC and Fort Lauderdale, FL. Fascinated since childhood by all things French, she graduated from Brown University with a major in Linguistic Anthropology.

JÉRÔME SAVARY was born in Argentina in 1942. His family moved to France in 1947, where he began his music studies. He moved to New York City at 19 to play with such jazz greats as Count Basie and Thelonious Monk. He first ventured into theater in 1965 creating the Grand Magic Circus, an over-the-top troupe of actors, clowns, animals and magicians. In the following 45 years, he has directed over 200 musicals, operas, operettas and plays in English, French, Spanish, German and Italian, which have played in major cities throughout the world. Prior to heading L’Opéra-Comique in Paris (2000-2007), he served as director of the Théâtre National de Chaillot in Paris (1988-2000). He also headed the Carrefour

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Européen du Théâtre in Lyon (1986-1988) and Centre Dramatique National du Languedoc – Roussillon in Montpellier (1982-1985). Savary's most recent project is La Boîte à Rêves, an international center for theater companies in the South of France. Jérôme Savary was appointed a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur. Among his many other honors, he is the recipient of the Molière Award, as well as ten Molière Award nominations; the Victoire de la Musique Award; Grand Insigne d'Honneur from the Republic of Austria; the Prix des étoiles from the Festival International du Film Fantastique d'Avoriaz; and the Médaille de la Ville de Paris, among others.

The curtains for "Looking for Josephine" are September 17 & 18 at 7:30pm, September 19 at 8pm, September 20 at 3pm, September 24 & 25 at 7:30pm, September 26 at 8pm and September 27 at 3pm. All tickets are \$15, and are available at the Alexander Kasser Theater Box Office, 1 Normal Avenue, Montclair, NJ 07043, by calling (973) 655-5112 or online at www.peakperfs.org.

SUNDAY BRUNCH AT CHEZ JOSEPHINE IN NEW YORK CITY

Preceding Sunday performances of "Looking for Josephine," a celebratory brunch will be served at Chez Josephine in New York City at 11am for \$19.26 per person. One of Josephine Baker's adopted sons and owner of Chez Josephine serves as host. Reservations can be made by calling (212) 594-1925. Chez Josephine is located at 414 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036. A reserved bus will depart Chez Josephine at 1:30pm for the 3pm curtain at Peak Performances@Montclair. Following the performance, the bus will return to Manhattan. Tickets (\$15 a piece) and bus transportation (\$10 round trip) can be reserved by calling (973) 655-5112.

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