



**JAZZ MASTER DUKE ELLINGTON'S ONLY OPERA GETS LOCAL
PREMIERE WHEN OAKLAND OPERA THEATER PRESENTS
"QUEENIE PIE"
May 9-25, 2008**

OAKLAND (21 April 2008) – **Oakland Opera Theater**, applauded by critics and audiences for its intimately staged, professionally produced performances of 20th and 21st century operas, will present local audiences with a thrilling first look at jazz master Duke Ellington's only opera, **QUEENIE PIE**. Under the artistic direction of **Tom Dean** and musical direction of **Deirdre McClure**, Oakland Opera Theater has assembled an expert team to complete this jazzy opera gem, including renowned stage director and choreographer **Michael Mohammed**, musical orchestrator and arranger **Marc Bolin**, and playwright **Tommy Shepherd**. Originally intended as an hour-long TV special, this production will be set on a television sound-stage in the late 1960's à la *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and will feature the live big-band sounds of the **Marcus Shelby Jazz Orchestra**. Bay Area chanteuse **Amanda King**, stage and film actress **Kathleen Antonia**, and stage veteran **Noah Griffin** star in this toe-tapping take on one of Ellington's final works. **QUEENIE PIE** plays **May 9-25 (press opening May 10)** at the Oakland Metro Operahouse, 630 3rd Street (three blocks from Jack London Square). For tickets (\$24 Seniors; \$28 advance; \$35 at the door) and information the public may call **510-763-1146** or visit **www.oaklandopera.org**.

Begun in the 1940's and left unfinished at the time of Ellington's death in 1974, **QUEENIE PIE**, the story of a Harlem beauty queen, was written as a tribute to Madame C. J. Walker, the first female African-American millionaire. The opera was originally commissioned for a television program and designed to be an hour-long work with Ellington as narrator; after the telecast fell through, he continued to work on the piece until he died, leaving the work without a complete score or libretto. With an incomplete score, this genre-bending African-American opera "buffo" has remained unperformed for over 20 years, and virtually lost since the death of Mercer Ellington, (Duke Ellington's bandleader son) in 1996. Oakland Opera Theater's production of **QUEENIE PIE** is not only a spectacular jazz-opera, but it restores an important American work to the world's opera repertoire.

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OAKLAND OPERA THEATER “QUEENIE PIE”

Director **Michael Mohammed** (*X: The Life & Times of Malcolm X*, *Great Moments in History*, and *White Darkness*) returns to Oakland Opera Theater to direct **QUEENIE PIE**. Additional credits include *Wilde Boys* at New Conservatory Theater and productions with the San Francisco Symphony, Ragazzi Boys Chorus, Berkeley Opera, Cinnabar Theater, Thrillpeddlers, and Goat Hall Productions. Completing Ellington’s libretto for **QUEENIE PIE** is playwright and actor **Tommy Shepherd**. A co-founder of the internationally-acclaimed live hip hop band Felonious: onelovehiphop, Shepherd is also a member of the Intersection for the Arts resident theatre company, Campo Santo. **QUEENIE PIE** musical arranger and orchestrator **Marc Bolin** has toured extensively, performing with the Guy Lombardo Orchestra, the Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey Orchestras, Carla Bley, the Virginia Beach Pops, Sheila E, Pete Escovedo, Black Eyed Peas, Herman Olivera, and the Ink Spots; he can also be heard performing with the Marcus Shelby Jazz Orchestra.

Oakland Opera Theater has assembled an impressive ensemble for **QUEENIE PIE** including **Amanda King**, who makes her Oakland Opera Theater debut as the titular Queenie Pie. King has been featured in dramatic and musical theater productions in the United States and abroad; she holds the distinction of being one of the youngest actors accepted as an apprentice at the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Additionally, King was featured in the World Premiere of Terrence McNally’s *Crucifixion* at New Conservatory Theater; she recently performed her solo show *Chanteuse* to critical acclaim at The Empire Plush Room in San Francisco. **Kathleen Antonia** appears as Café Olay in **QUEENIE PIE**. Antonia’s regional credits include productions with 42nd Street Moon, African-American Shakespeare Company, American Conservatory Theater, Campo Santo, San Francisco Mime Troupe, San Francisco Opera, SF Playhouse, and Shotgun Players. She released her debut solo CD *Next Time* in 2007. Also featured in **QUEENIE PIE** is Bay Area stage veteran **Noah Griffin** as Little Daddy. Griffin has had the fortune to share the stage with Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson, and Leontyne Price. Recent appearances include performances at Caesar’s Palace, Las Vegas, and New York’s Birdland. Rounding out the talented ensemble are **Stephan Artise; Sarita Cannon; Clara McDaniel; Tina Marzell; Tania Johnson; and Chauncey Roberts.**

American composer, pianist, and bandleader **Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington** is widely recognized as one of the most influential figures in jazz. One of the 20th century’s best-known African-American celebrities, Ellington delivered some of his biggest musical hits during the 1930s and 40s, including *Mood Indigo* (1930); *It Don’t Mean a Thing (If It Ain’t Got That Swing)* (1932); *Sophisticated Lady* (1933); *In a Sentimental Mood* (1935); *Caravan* (1937); *I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart* (1938); *Do Nothing Till*

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OAKLAND OPERA THEATER “QUEENIE PIE”

You Hear from Me (1940); and *Take the “A” Train* (written with Billy Strayhorn in 1941). During the 1940s, Ellington’s long-term aim became to extend the jazz form beyond the “three-minute limit.” He composed and recorded the long piece *Creole Rhapsody* as early as 1931, but it was not until the 1940s that this longer form became a regular feature of his work; his next long form work was *Black, Brown, and Beige* (1943), which was dedicated to telling the story of African-Americans, the place of slavery, and the church in their history.

Ellington and his orchestra appeared in films throughout the 1930s and 1940s, including such features as *Murder at the Vanities*, *Belle of the Nineties* (1934), and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943). In the late 1950s, his work in films took the shape of scoring soundtracks, notably for *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959) with Jimmy Stewart, and *Paris Blues* (1961), which featured Paul Newman and Sidney Poitier as jazz musicians. It was also during the 1950s that songstress Ella Fitzgerald recorded the *Duke Ellington Songbook* with Ellington and his orchestra, a recognition that Ellington’s songs had officially become part of the cultural canon known as the “Great American Songbook.” Though his later work is often overshadowed by his music of the early 1940s, Ellington continued to make vital and innovative recordings late into his career, including *The Far East Suite* (1966), *The New Orleans Suite* (1970), and *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse* (1971). Ellington was awarded the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award (1966), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1969), and the French Legion of Honor (1973); he was awarded a posthumous Pulitzer Prize citation in 1999. Duke Ellington died of lung cancer and pneumonia on May 24, 1974, a month after his 75th birthday; he led his band from 1923 until his death.

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OAKLAND OPERA THEATER "QUEENIE PIE"

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: **Oakland Opera Theater**, applauded by local critics and audiences for its intimately staged, professionally produced performances of 20th and 21st century operas, presents local audiences with a thrilling first look at jazz master Duke Ellington's only opera, **QUEENIE PIE**. Begun in the 1940's and left unfinished at the time of Ellington's death, **QUEENIE PIE**, the story of a Harlem beauty queen, was written as a tribute to Madame C. J. Walker, the first female African-American millionaire. Under the artistic direction of **Tom Dean** and musical direction of **Deirdre McClure**, Oakland Opera Theater has assembled an expert team to complete this jazzy opera gem, including renowned stage director **Michael Mohammed**, musical orchestrator and arranger **Marc Bolin**, and playwright **Tommy Shepherd**. Originally intended as an hour long TV special, this production will be set on a television sound-stage in the late 1960's à la *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and will feature the live big-band sounds of the **Marcus Shelby Jazz Orchestra**. Bay Area chanteuse **Amanda King**, stage and film actress **Kathleen Antonia**, and stage veteran **Noah Griffin** star in this toe-tapping take on one of Ellington's final works.

DATES: **Preview: May 9, 2008**
Opens: May 10, 2008
(Press Opening: May 10)
Closes: May 25, 2008

SHOWS: **May 9-11, 15-18, 22-25**
Thursdays-Saturdays at 8pm; Sundays at 2pm

WHERE: **Oakland Metro Operahouse**
630 3rd Street
(three blocks from Jack London Square)

TICKETS: For tickets (\$24 seniors, \$28 advance, \$35 at the door) the public can call **510-763-1146** or visit **www.oaklandopera.org**

PHOTOS: High-resolution digital art can be found at
<http://www.cb-pr.com/press/queeniepie.html>

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