

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 19, 2023

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Palace Theatre Announcement

Morris Chestnut Named Ambassador of Albany's Renaissance Black Film Festival as New York Raises the State's Film Tax Credit Cap to \$700M

With the guidance of Festival Ambassador Morris Chestnut and honorary board members Gail Bean of FX's hit series Snowfall and writer, producer, director Jamal Hill, the inaugural Renaissance Black Film Festival at Albany's historic Palace Theatre will spotlight the work of up-and-coming Black filmmakers in the industry's blossoming new production hub.

Albany, NY – The first annual Renaissance Black Film Festival (RBFF) is coming to New York's Capital region, running **June 22–25** at the historic **Palace Theatre** and the opulent **Renaissance Hotel**, both within walking distance from one another in Albany's charming Downtown business district.

The festival is helmed by serial entrepreneur and Palace Theatre's Executive Director **Kevin Johnson**, filmmaker **Micah Khan**, and premier creative agency **Collectiveeffort**, and supported by NAACP Image Award recipient **Morris Chestnut** as the Festival's ambassador, and panelists and honorary board members **Gail Bean** of FX's *Snowfall* and Starz's *P-Valley* and acclaimed screenwriter and director **Jamal Hill**, among many others. RBFF was developed with two goals in mind: to spotlight Black artists and creatives within the film industry, and to recognize New York's Capital Region as a budding filmmaking epicenter.

"Over the last decade, we've seen about 20 productions come to the area, each growing larger and larger. The secret of the flexibility, affordability and overall beauty of our area has gotten out and folks that are here should be ready to join the industry as it lays roots," says Collectiveeffort Co-founder Patrick Harris.

RBFF will show films from a plethora of Black filmmakers across the country, with awards and cash prizes going to **Best Narrative Feature**, **Best Documentary Feature**, **Best Narrative Short**, **Best Documentary Short**, and **Best First Project**. The festival's curators are **accepting submissions up until June 7**.

Complementing the continuous showing of films over the weekend will be: a series of **panel discussions**, private **networking mixers**, public **afterparties**, an **award**

ceremony, and a few special **surprise screenings** from some of Hollywood's biggest names!

Actress and honorary board member Gail Bean said of the upcoming festival: "It's important for me to attend regional festivals so that I can interact with other filmmakers, artists and our supporters. Regional festivals provide a space for people in this industry to really develop community and support. We network organically while being inspired by our peers. Regional festivals pour into the artist, which in turn is great for the industry."

Lastly, the RBFF would not be possible without its generous partners, which includes [Business For Good](#) as a founding partner, [Renaissance Albany](#), [Palace Theatre](#), [Albany Black Chamber of Commerce](#), [Price Chopper](#) and [Film Albany](#).

"Business For Good is thrilled to support The Renaissance Black Film Festival, delivering on our commitment to racial equity within the Greater Capital Region," says CEO Jahkeen Hoke. "As a founding partner, we believe this event will not only create a transformative platform for black filmmakers but will also bring more film and television production to Albany and the local region. It is an honor to support this festival, showcasing black excellence on the screen for all to enjoy."

Deb Goedeke of the Albany County Film Commissioner adds, "Film Albany is thrilled to partner with and welcome the Renaissance Black Film Fest to Albany. Many BIPOC films shot here in the Capital Region have gone on to debut at Sundance and other film festivals. Film Albany will consistently commit to championing projects and productions for all creative partners in our city and beyond."

For more on the Renaissance Black Film Festival, including show and event schedules, volunteer opportunities, and, most importantly, how filmmakers can submit their work for viewing, please visit palacealbany.org and filmfreeway.com/blackfilmfestny.

About Gail Bean

Gail Bean is a multi-hyphenate actress currently starring in Starz's gritty drama P-Valley as Roulette. She most recently played Wanda in five seasons of FX's critically-acclaimed drama series Snowfall, which just aired its series finale in April 2023. Bean portrayed Wanda's journey with sheer humanity and honesty while offering an authentic viewpoint of battling addiction.

In 2014, Bean starred in Duffle, a short film by indie filmmaker Eric Rhea that explores the story of a young unemployed father-to-be struggling to follow the right path when faced with fatherhood. In 2015, the St. Louis native starred in Kris Swanberg's Sundance hit, Unexpected, opposite Cobie Smulders, where she was listed on Hollywood Reporter as the Top 10 Next Generation Breakout Stars of Sundance. Additional roles include Spectrum's Paradise Lost, which launched in the summer of 2020, and the Indie favorite, Test Pattern, that shares the story of a couple's relationship being tested after a traumatic experience. Bean's credits also include James Gunn's horror thriller, The Belko Experiment in 2016, Issa Rae's Insecure, Chicago PD, Atlanta, and Detroiters.

Committed to using her platform to empower and educate, Bean is actively involved in philanthropic programs that provide art resources to support disenfranchised

communities for healing and upliftment. She is a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and continuously champions financial literacy and entrepreneurship. She continues to be a staunch advocate for community service, theater programs, and art projects centered on helping children and young adults.

About Jamal Hill

Born in New York and raised in Philadelphia, Jamal Hill was fascinated with all of the arts, particularly music and movies. As a result he studied screenwriting and directing. After years of studying and honing his craft, Hill and his mother ambitiously produced a \$10,000 independent film entitled *Money Power Respect* from a 75-page script he wrote. He shot it in 11 days with 3 of his film colleagues, family members and local Philadelphia theater actors. The film won Philly Underground Film Festival and was ultimately distributed by Jeff Clanagan's Code Black Entertainment.

Soon after its release a Will Smith and Overbrook Entertainment associate, Charlie Mack Alston, reached out to Hill about his talent. Subsequently, Hill began working on films such as *I Am Legend*, *Hancock*, and *Iron Man*. After a meeting with legendary talent manager Troy Carter, Hill directed Lady Gaga's *The Fame* short concert movie entitled *Candy Warhol*. In 2010, Hill returned to Philadelphia to direct a music-based feature film entitled *Streets*, starring hip-hop star Meek Mill and Nafessa Williams, star of The CW's *Black Lightning* (also produced by Alston); it was released nationally by the BET network in 2012.

As a result he landed a deal with Queen Latifah's Flavor Unit Entertainment to write and direct a slate of films, including *Brotherly Love*, his first theatrically-released film that was nominated for an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Independent Motion Picture, and *Deuces* starring Larenz Tate, Lance Gross and Meagan Good, released on Netflix. Hill is currently writing, directing and producing original film and television content under the Philavision Entertainment banner.

About Micah Khan

Micah Khan has directed and produced over 30 short films. He recently wrapped his feature debut, *The Zombie Wedding*, the first film to launch the Weekly World News IP-Driven studio slate. The 21-person ensemble cast includes Cheri Oteri, Seth Gilliam, Heather Matarazzo, Kevin Chamberlin and many more!

His latest short film, *Meetcute on Danceworld*, was featured on *MovieMaker Magazine*, and was said to be "fresh, original and it kicks ass," David Benioff of HBO's *Game of Thrones* Before that, his action short film, *Safe House*, was the winner of Robert Rodriguez's People's Network Showcase Contest and premiered on El Rey Network. Micah is currently a mentee for Mentorship Matters BIPOC Writers Initiative sponsored by Amazon and AMC Networks. Micah is currently collaborating with *MovieMaker Magazine* on a series of interviews on the craft of filmmaking where he's interviewed Oscar-nominated filmmakers like Denis Villeneuve, Spike Lee, Joe Wright, Zach Braff, and many more.

Micah is the co-founder of the 518 Film Network, whose mission is to connect Capital Region creatives and create a collaborative community.

About the Palace Theatre

The Palace has been Albany's iconic downtown landmark for the past eight decades, bringing the biggest names in entertainment to the Capital Region. The history and programming of the Palace is a unique and often untold story with roots dating back to the period of the Great Depression. The Palace Theatre, built in 1931, originally presented vaudeville acts, feature films and became a civic auditorium before closing its doors in 1969. The theatre maintains its original beauty and design and is a historical landmark in the City of Albany. The Palace Performing Arts Center was established in 1984 and incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1989, created to operate the Palace Theatre. The mission of the Palace is to bring world-class arts and entertainment to New York's Capital Region, greatly enhancing the area's cultural and economic development. Our mission is carried out through core programming and community initiatives that include performing arts entertainment, free arts education, family-friendly performances, free summer movies, an annual community block party and more. The Palace has a significant economic footprint with over \$3.5 million in ticket sales and 180,000 patrons.

About Collectiveeffort

Collectiveeffort is a creative agency based in Troy, NY, focused on building sustainable creative communities through storytelling and community development. From small businesses to Fortune 100 companies, local offices to state agencies, Collectiveeffort offers content marketing, branding and consulting that helps organizations connect with their customers, employees and local community. Our goal is to fuel the development of the creative economy, and to do so, we offer affordable workspace and educational services to developing artists, creatives and entrepreneurs as they build culture in emerging communities.

Tickets go on sale FRIDAY, MAY 26 via Ticketmaster at [ticketmaster.com](https://www.ticketmaster.com). Tickets are also available for purchase at the **Palace Theatre Box Office** (located at 19 Clinton Ave). Box Office hours are Monday – Friday Noon to 5PM as well as select days and hours for events and On Sales.

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