

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

ODETTA

(World Premiere – 2014)

Choreography: Matthew Rushing

Assistants to the Choreographer: Renee Robinson & Michael Jackson, Jr.

Music by Odetta & Various Artists

Sound design: Russell J. Cowans IV

Costumes: Dante Anthony Baylor

Lighting: Andre Vasquez

Scenic Design: Travis George

Original artwork by Stephen Alcorn

Odetta Holmes – one of the most influential singers of the 20th century – is rediscovered as renowned Ailey dancer **Matthew Rushing** marries soul-stirring movement to songs by the artist anointed “the queen of American folk music” by Martin Luther King, Jr. Rushing’s world premiere for Ailey, created with the support of commissioning funds from **New York City Center**, will pay tribute to Holmes’s life as a singer, songwriter, actress, activist and “the voice of the Civil Rights Movement.” With a musical repertoire encompassing American folk music, blues, jazz, and spirituals, Odetta influenced many key figures of the 1960s folk-revival scene including Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Mavis Staples, and Janis Joplin. Her song “Take This Hammer” was included on *TIME* magazine’s list of the All-Time 100 Songs. With projections by artist Stephen Alcorn, *ODETTA* will be Matthew Rushing’s third ballet created for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The cast of 12 perform to spoken word and songs by Odetta, including “This Little Light of “Mine,” “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child,” “Cool Water,” “Glory, Glory.” It also includes an original recording of the “Freedom Trilogy” Odetta famously performed at the 1963 March on Washington that was recreated for the ballet by Ysaye M. Barnwell (formerly of Sweet Honey in the Rock), who looked up to Odetta as a mentor.



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Matthew Rushing’s *ODETTA*. Photo by Steve Wilson



“The singer whose resonant voice wove together the strongest songs of American folk music and the civil rights movement”

- *The New York Times*

“The Queen of American Folk Music”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Rosa Parks was once asked which songs meant the most to her.

“All of the songs Odetta sings,” she replied.

“She is the reigning queen of American folk music, reminding us all that songs have the power to change the heart and change the world.”

- President Bill Clinton

“If only one could be sure that every 50 years a voice and a soul like Odetta’s would come along, the centuries would pass so quickly and painlessly we would hardly recognize time.”

- Maya Angelou

MATTHEW RUSHING

Matthew Rushing was born in Los Angeles, CA. He began his dance training with Kashmir Blake in Inglewood, CA and later continued his training at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. He is the recipient of a Spotlight Award and Dance Magazine Award and was named a Presidential Scholar in the Arts. He was a scholarship student at The Ailey School and later became a member of Ailey II, where he danced for a year. During his career, Mr. Rushing has performed as a guest artist for galas in Vail, Colorado, as well as in Austria, Canada, France, Italy, and Russia. He has performed for Presidents George H. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, as well as at the 2010 White House tribute to Judith Jamison. During his time with the Company he has choreographed two ballets: *Acceptance In Surrender* (2005), a collaboration with Hope Boykin and Abdur Rahim-Jackson, and *Uptown* (2009), a tribute to the Harlem Renaissance. In 2012, he created *Moan*, which was set on Philadanco and premiered at The Joyce Theater. Mr. Rushing joined the Company in 1992 and became Rehearsal Director and Guest Artist in June 2010.

ODETTA

Odetta (nee Odetta Homes), born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1930 was one of the most influential artist/activists of the 20th Century. Before Odetta, no solo woman performer (let alone an African American woman) had toured the world singing folk, blues, Negro spirituals, work songs and protest songs while telling the stories of America's traumatic southern experience. Her 1950s and 60s classic recordings of "He's Got The Whole World In His Hands," "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," "Kumbaya," "Goodnight Irene," "Amazing Grace," "Oh Freedom" and "This Little Light of Mine," became folk and spiritual classics throughout the world and inspired an entire generation. Odetta introduced Bob Dylan to folk music, and in her 60 year career, she influenced hundreds of other artists, including Janis Joplin, Harry Belafonte, Joan Baez, Carly Simon, Sweet Honey in the Rock and Tracy Chapman. As a civil rights pioneer, Odetta marched in Selma, sang for President Kennedy, and her voice gave spirit to the masses at the 1963 March on Washington, as Martin Luther King, Jr. anointed her "Queen of American Folk Music." When Rosa Parks was asked in her biography what songs she listened to during the civil rights struggle, she responded, "*Essentially all the songs of Odetta.*" When President Clinton honored her at the White House with the National Medal of Arts and Humanities, he remarked, "*Odetta reminds us all that songs have the power to change the heart and change the world.*" and Maya Angelou, Odetta's friend of fifty-five years, would later write, "*If only one could be sure that every 50 years a voice and a soul like Odetta's would come along, the centuries would pass so quickly and painlessly we would hardly recognize time.*" Despite battling crippling heart disease and pulmonary fibrosis the last decade of her life, Odetta continued performing around the world until her final passing on December 2, 2008. The headline of her New York Times' front page obituary, read: *ODETTA, Voice of the Civil Rights Movement, Dies at 77.* The children's book, ODETTA The Queen of Folk (Scholastic Trade Publishing Co.), by Stephen Alcorn, was awarded the 2011 Aesop Accolade Award by the American Folklore Society.

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Quote from Marianne Williamson (from "This Little Light of Mine"), Words and Music by Odetta F. Gordon. Pookie Tree Publishing Co. (ASCAP), Album: Gonna Let It Shine, A Concert for the Holidays, Publisher: Pookie Tree Publishing Co. * "This Little Light of Mine" Words and Music by Odetta F. Gordon. Pookie Tree Publishing Co. (ASCAP), Album: Odetta Sings Folk Songs, Record Label: RCA Records (division of Sony Music Entertainment)* "Prettiest Train" Album: Negro Prison Songs from The Mississippi State Penitentiary. Audio from Last Word: Odetta Interview, Audio Provided by T3Media From the Interview: Last Word: Odetta. ^ "Ox Driver's Song" Album: Odetta 7 Classic Albums Plus Bonus Radio Tracks, Record Label: Real Tyme. "John Henry." Audio Clip by Camille Cosby, Album: Odetta: Life in Music, Publisher: National Visionary Leadership Project, Audio interview from Archival materials courtesy of The National Visionary Leadership Project; www.visionaryproject.org. "There's a Hole In The Bucket" by Harry Belafonte and Odetta Felious Gordon. Published by Clara Music Publishing Corp. (ASCAP) Clara Music Publishing Corp. Administered by Next Decade Entertainment, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.* Audio from Last Word: Odetta Interview, Audio Provided by T3Media, From the Interview: Last Word: Odetta. ^ "Motherless Children" Words and Music by Odetta F. Gordon. Pookie Tree Publishing Co. (ASCAP), Album: Odetta 7 Classic Albums Plus Bonus Radio Tracks, Publisher: Pookie Tree Publishing Co, Record Label: Real Tyme.* "Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child" Words and Music by Odetta F. Gordon. Pookie Tree Publishing Co. (ASCAP) Album: Odetta 7 Classic Albums Plus Bonus Radio Tracks, Publisher: Pookie Tree Publishing Co, Record Label: Real Tyme.* Audio from Last Word: Odetta Interview, Audio Provided by T3Media, From the Interview Last Word: Odetta.^ "Cool Water" by Bob Nolan, Album: One Grain of Sand. "Masters of War" Bob Dylan, Album: Odetta Sings Dylan, Record Label: Camden Record Label (division of BMG Entertainment). "Glory, Glory" Words and Music by Odetta F. Gordon. Pookie Tree Publishing Co. (ASCAP), Album: Odetta 7 Classic Albums, Plus Bonus Radio Tracks, Publisher: Pookie Tree Publishing Co, Record Label: Real Tyme.* "Freedom Trilogy" Musical Arrangement by Ysaye M. Barnwell and Seth Farber. Vocal Performance by Ysaye M. Barnwell and Piano Performance by Seth Farber.

* Words and Music by Odetta F. Gordon. Pookie Tree Publishing Co. (ASCAP).** Words and Music by Odetta F. Gordon. Pookie Tree Publishing Co. (ASCAP). Odetta's name, voice, likeness, and biographical information provided courtesy of the Estate of Odetta, www.odettamusic.com

^ Audio from "Last Word: Odetta" interview. Audio provided by T3Media from the interview: "Last Word: Odetta."