



VIRGINIA STAGE COMPANY
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release • August 24, 2006 • Contact: Chad Bauman, (757) 627-6988 ext. 343

**Crowns fills the Wells Theatre with Gospel Music
and plenty of “Hattitude”**

Virginia Stage Company kicks off its 28th Season with the gospel music infused celebration *Crowns*, written by Regina Taylor and directed by José Zayas. A joyous celebration of African-American women and their fabulous church hats, *Crowns* will make you want dance in the aisles during this theatrical sensation about a cherished custom that fuses faith and fashion.

The production runs from September 19 through October 8, 2006. Tickets to *Crowns* range in price from \$8.00 to \$42.50, with Sunday, September 17, 2006 serving as a Pay-What-You-Can performance. Virginia Stage Company will continue its popular Best Ticket in Town Program during the 2006-07 Season. Best Ticket in Town performances will be September 19-21, 2006 and all tickets will be sold for \$8.00. All tickets may be purchased thru Ticketmaster at the VSC Box Office or any Ticketmaster outlet, by calling (757) 671-8100 or online at www.vastage.com.

Crowns is full of African American women who know that with the right attitude, any hat can be a crown and its wearer a queen. Adapted from the acclaimed book, *Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats* by Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry, Regina Taylor's musical presents an oral history of African-American women affectionately known as “hat queens.” *Crowns* centers around a street-wise New York teenager, Yolanda, who is sent to her grandmother's home down south to find her roots. She learns that since the days of slavery and beyond for black women, hats have been their crowning glory, especially at church on Sunday. *Crowns* carries Yolanda through American slavery, the Jim Crow era and to present day where she ultimately discovers her own identity along with her African roots. “*Crowns* is a production that has taken the nation by storm and I am thrilled that VSC has found a cast to make its area premiere a joyous one,” said Chris Hanna, VSC's Artistic Director.

Described by the Atlanta Journal Constitution as a “soul-stirring, hip-swaying spectacle” and “a made to order crowd pleaser,” *Crowns* has been one of the most popular musicals in the nation the past two years. Originally produced by the McCarter Theatre in 2002, it had its New York debut at Second Stage Theatre and elicited glowing reviews causing the New York Times to crow, “Hats off to ‘Crowns!’” Since its debut, *Crowns* has sold out some of the largest houses in the nation including Chicago's Goodman Theatre, Denver's Denver Center Theatre and Washington DC's Arena Stage.

Crowns marks Mr. Zaya's directing debut at Virginia Stage Company. His directing credits include work at Urban Stages, Altered Stages, 59e59 theaters, HERE Arts Center, Theater 3, Cherry Lane, Spanish Repertory, Teatro Circulo, Old Dominion University, Red Clay Theater, Village Light Opera, Ontological-Hysterical Theater, and Unseen Theater Company. He is the recipient of a Peter Sellars Directing Award, a Drama Clan Award, a John Pasquin Fellowship and is an alumnus of the Lincoln Center's Director's Lab '06. He was a Kenneth Frankel Directing Fellow at Manhattan Theatre Club and is a Drama League Directing Fellow. From 2001-2006, Mr. Zayas was the Artistic Director of The Immediate Theater Company.

For a complete press kit, please contact Chad Bauman, Director of Communications, at (757) 627-6988 ext. 343.

Chris Hanna, Artistic Director Keith Stava, Managing Director
P.O. Box 3770, Norfolk, VA 23514 P: 757.627.6988 F: 757.628.5958
Website: www.vastage.com

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FACT SHEET

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Box Office Information: In Person: At the Wells Theater (corner of Tazewell & Monticello Streets), Phone: 757-627-1234, Fax: 757-628-5958, Online: www.vastage.com. Tickets may also be purchased at any Ticketmaster outlet or by calling Ticketmaster at (757) 671-8100.

CAST

Yolanda.....MONICA PATRICE QUINTANILLA*
Preacher Man.....ADRIAN BAILEY*
Mother Shaw.....BARBARA MILLS*
Janette.....APRIL NIXON*
Velma.....KELLIE TURNER*
Mabel.....JOILET F. HARRIS*
Wanda.....NORMA BASS

* denotes membership in Actors' Equity Association

Musicians

Pianist.....e'MARCUS HARPER
Drummer.....ANTHONY HAILEY

COMPANY:

CROWNS

by Regina Taylor

**adapted from the book by
Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry**

SET DESIGN
Anita Tripathi Easterling

COSTUME DESIGN
Jeni Schaefer

LIGHTING DESIGN
A. Nelson Ruger IV

SOUND DESIGN
Michael Boso

CHREOGRAPHER
Tamika Steeley

ADDITIONAL CHOREOGRAPHY
& STAGING
April Nixon

CASTING DIRECTOR
Harriet Bass

STAGE MANAGER
Bradley C. Cooper

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
e'Marcus Harper

DIRECTED BY
José Zayas

Crowns was originally produced by the McCarter Theatre Center, Princeton, New Jersey and by Second Stage Theatre, New York City. *Crowns* was originally commissioned by the McCarter Theatre Center and was developed with the assistance of the Sundance Institute Theatre Laboratory.

Crowns by Regina Taylor is presented by arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc., in New York.

***Crowns* is sponsored by the F. Ludwig Diehn Fund of The Norfolk Foundation**

Virginia Stage Company is funded in part by grants from the Norfolk Commission on the Arts and Humanities, The Business Consortium for Arts Support, The Virginia Commission for the Arts, the City of Norfolk, The Norfolk Foundation and the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Additional Staff for *CROWNS*

APRIL NIXON*
Dance Captain

e'MARCUS HARPER
Additional Musical Arrangements

ISSAC HAYWOOD
Assistant Lighting Designer

SUSAN CIANFAGLIONE
Costume Shop Volunteer

SPECIAL THANKS
Richard St. Peter, Linda Hurwitz, Ann Bierman, Trinity Presbyterian Church, Patty Darden, Jeni Schaefer, St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Virginia Stage Company is a member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) and is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national service organization for the non-profit professional theatre.



The Actors and Stage Managers employed in this production are members of Actors' Equity Association
the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.



United Scenic Artists represents the designers and scenic painters for the American Theater.

WEBSITE
www.vastage.com

BLOG
www.vastage.blogspot.com

MYSPACE
www.myspace.com/vastage

Performance Schedule

Pay-What-You-Can Performance: Sunday, September 17 7:00pm

Best Ticket in Town Performances (Previews): Tuesday, September 19 7:00 pm; Wednesday, September 20 8:00 pm; Thursday, September 21 8:00pm

Opening Night/Press Night: Friday, September 22 8:00 pm

Public Performances: Saturday, September 23 4:00 pm & 8:00 pm; Sunday, September 24 2:00 pm & 7:00 pm; Tuesday, September 26 7:00 pm; Wednesday, September 27 8:00pm; Thursday, September 28 8:00 pm; Friday, September 29 8:00 pm; Saturday, September 30 4:00 pm & 8:00 pm; Sunday, October 1 2:00 pm; Tuesday, October 3 7:00 pm; Wednesday, October 4 8:00 pm; Thursday, October 5 8:00 pm; Friday, October 6 8:00pm, Saturday, October 7 4:00pm & 8:00pm; Sunday, October 8 2:00pm

Signed Performance: Saturday, September 29 8:00pm

After Performance Discussion: Sunday, September 24 2:00pm

Closing Performance: Sunday, October 8 2:00pm



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Adrian Bailey (*Preacher Man*) has appeared in over a dozen Broadway shows. He was last seen on Broadway as Jacob in the 2005 revival of *La Cage Aux Folles*. Other Broadway credits include *The Lion King*, *The Wild Party*, *Smokey Joes' Cafe*, *The Who's TOMMY*, *Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, *Jelly's Last Jam*, *Black & Blue*, *Legs Diamond*, *My One & Only* and *Sophisticated Ladies* to name a few. Off Broadway credits: *Flyin' West*, *Storyville* and *Boys from Syracuse*. Television credits include HBO's *The Josephine Baker Story*. Prior to appearing in *Crowns*, Adrian appeared in Portland Center Stage's *The Fantastiks*. Adrian is proud to be making his VSC debut.



Norma Bass (*Wanda*) was born in Augusta, Georgia as one of ten children. Her initial "formal" musical training amounted to performing for shrubs and pets on an old stump in front of their house. Musically her exposure had been church music with the occasional wedding or funeral. Norma has also collaborated on several performances with the ongoing run of *Ella- the Life and Music of Ella Fitzgerald*, at the legends walk in Virginia Beach. She recently sang the role of "Mama" in the Yoder Barn's Production of *Children of Eden*. Norma has also performed with the U. S. Atlantic Fleet Band at the Virginia Beach Pavilion and at Chrysler Hall. She is also a member of the Virginia Beach Chorale.



Joilet F. Harris (*Mabel*) is happy to be making her VSC debut, reprising the role she portrayed at Arkansas Repertory Theatre last season. She went on to play *Mother Shaw* in *Crowns* at the Asolo Theatre. Theater credits include *Menopause the Musical*, *It Ain't Nothin' But The Blues*, *Finian's Rainbow*, *Damn Yankees*, *Porgy & Bess*, *St. Louis Woman*, *Candide*, *The Buddy Holly Story*, *Kudzu*, *Black Nativity*, *Jacques Brel Is Alive & Well...*, and countless others. TV and film credits: *NY Undercover*, *Philly*, *Hack*, *Animal Factory*, *Rocky V*, *12 Monkeys*, *Maximum Risk*, *Beloved*, and *In Her Shoes*. Joilet currently plays "Detective Caroline" on the HBO series *The Wire*. She is a founding member of the Philadelphia Black Theatre Festival. To God be the Glory!



Barbara Mills (*Mother Shaw*) returns to Virginia Stage Company where she was last seen in *Blues in the Night*. Off-Broadway credits include Mama/Claire Smith in *Josephine's Song* at the York Theatre and *Lust in Rabboni* at the Minskoff Theatre. National and international tours include Nell/Armelia in *Ain't Misbehavin'*, Miss Barbie in *Harlem Kids Symphony*, and Jewel in *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*. Other theatre credits include Mabel in *Crowns* at The Guthrie Theater and The Goodman Theatre; *Mother Shaw* in *Crowns* at The Denver Center Theatre and Arena Stage; *It Ain't Nothin' But The Blues* (nominated for a Barrymore Award for Outstanding



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Supporting Actress in a Musical); the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella*; Luce in *Boys from Syracuse*; Blues Speak Woman in *Spunk*; and Quilly in *The Old Settler*. TV & film credits include Bessie in "Guiding Light," Delta Rayborn in *True Blue*, and a feature on "The Ru Paul Show." Recordings include *All of Me*. Barbara would like to dedicate all shows to the memory of her dear and loving parents, Thomas and Eunice Mills.



April Nixon (*Jeanette*), 1998 Olivier Award Nominee, is honored to be a part of Virginia Stage Company! April's Broadway credits:

Tommy (Acid Queen), *Smokey Joe's Café* (u/s all 4 women), *Cats* (Tantomile). National Tours: *Crowns* (Jeanette), *Fosse* (Principle), *Damn Yankees* (Lola/opp Jerry Lewis), *The Wiz* (u/s Glinda). Off Broadway/Regional: *Sweet Charity* (Helene), *Dream Girls* (Joanne), *Lone Star Love* (u/s Ms. Quickly), *We Will Rock You* (Las Vegas), *Purlie* (w/ Blair Underwood), *Golden Boy* (w/ Alfonzo Rebiero), and many more! April has done her one woman show in NYC and LA to rave reviews! April has sang the national anthem for the Portland Trail Blazers, New York Knicks, Seattle Mariners and San Francisco Giants. Film/TV: *Law & Order: SVU* (Principle), *Dave Chapelle* (Principle), *The Wire* (Principle), *Maury Povich* (Principle), *Essence Awards* (Principle), *Tony Awards* (Principle), *The Man On The Moon* (w/ Jim Carrey). April is a proud member of Actors Equity. Special thanks to my mother Valarie and daughter Samaria.



Monica Patrice Quintanilla (*Yolanda*) is pleased to be making her Virginia Stage Company debut in *Crowns*. It is a story that has deeply

touched her heart before and she is thrilled to have another opportunity to bring Yolanda's character to life. Monica graduated from the Ray Bolger Musical Theater Program at UCLA in 2004 where she received a B.A in Theater. Recent roles include Nell Carter's role in *Ain't Misbehavin'* and Hattie in *Kiss Me Kate* at the Moonlight Amphitheater in Vista, California; also Yolanda in *Crowns* at The San Diego Repertory Theater, and her off-off Broadway debut as Erzulie in *Once on this Island* at The Gallery Players in Brooklyn, New York. Monica would love to thank her Mother Cenobia Quintanilla for her unwavering love and support, and her wonderful boyfriend Ryan Lafferty for always understanding. "Dreams only come true for those that believe that *their* dreams were meant for them".



Kellie Turner (*Velma*)

Broadway credits: Queenie in *ShowBoat*. Regional credits include *The Wiz* with Stephanie Mills and Andre DeShields, *Dreamgirls*, *Lady Day At Emerson's Bar And Grill*, *Intimate Apparel*, *Ain't Misbehaven*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hair*, *The Crucible* and the PBS live at Lincoln Center's production of *Porgy & Bess*. Kellie has toured internationally with gospel groups that have worked with the USO in Japan and Korea and has been a featured singer in Australia,



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New Zealand, and the Caribbean. She has toured with Queen Esther Marrow and Reverend Charles Lyles as choir director for their “Movin’ On” Tour in Germany, Budapest, France, The Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, and the Slovak Republic. Kellie’s group, The Harlem Messengers, has toured internationally as well. She is a graduate of Pepperdine University. I love you Mom. To God be the glory.

COMPANY

Regina Taylor (*Playwright*) is currently portraying Molly Blane on CBS’s “The Unit,” executive produced by Shawn Ryan and David Mamet. Her other acting credits include roles on Broadway, Off-Broadway and in numerous Regional Theaters. Regina’s film credits include *Clockers*, *Losing Isaiah*, *Lean on Me*, *A Family Thing*, *Courage Under Fire* with Denzel Washington, and *The Negotiator* with Samuel L. Jackson. For her role as Lilly Harper on the television series “I’ll Fly Away,” she won an NAACP Image Award, was nominated for an Emmy Award and received the Golden Globe Award for Best Leading Dramatic Actress. Her previous television credits include Cor in *Cora Unashamed* in PBS’s Masterpiece Theater American Collection, “The Education of Max Bickford” and “FEDS” (both for CBS), “Law & Order,” *Crisis at Central High*, *The Howard Beach Story*, *Children of the Dust* with Sidney Poitier, and *Strange Justice*, a Showtime original film in which she portrayed Anita Hill, with Delroy Lindo. Regina is also a playwright and theater director. Her latest play *The Dreams of Sarah Breedlove*, premiered in 2005 at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and was produced at the Goodman Theatre in June 2006. Regina’s award winning musical, *Crowns* has become one of the most performed musicals in this country this past year. She is an Artistic Associate at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, which

premiered *Drowning Crow*, her adaptation of Chekhov’s *The Seagull*, which was subsequently produced on Broadway by Manhattan Theatre Club. Other plays include *Urban Zulu Mambo*, *Escape from Paradise*, *Watermelon Rinds*, *Inside the Belly of the Beast*, *Mudtracks*, and *Oo-Bla-Dee*, which premiered at the Goodman and won the 2000 American Theatre Critics/Steinberg New Play Award. Upcoming projects for Regina include *Magnolia*, a play set in Atlanta in 1961 for the Alliance Theater, where she is a Resident Playwright.

José Zayas (*Director*) Credits include: *Devil Land* by Desi Moreno-Penson (Urban Stages, NYIT Award Nomination), *The Caterers* by Jonathan Leaf (Altered Stages, 3 NYIT Award Nominations), *The Germans in Paris* (59e59 theaters) by Jonathan Leaf, *Obscene Jesters* by Sloan Macrae (HERE Arts Center), *The Maid’s Tragedy* (HERE Arts Center), *Conspirators* by Brian Shoaf (HERE Arts Center), *The Ethics of Sexual Acts* by Jake Hooker (WAX), *Would You Lie To Me? Please?* by Padraic O’Reilly (Theater 3), *3 to a Session: A Monster’s Tale* by Desi Moreno-Penson (Cherry Lane, DUTF winner best play), *Madre* (El Drama Padre) (Spanish Repertory, winner of two HOLA awards, 4 ACE Award nominations), *El Arte De La Pintura* (Teatro Circulo), *Life is a Dream* (Old Dominion University), *Orestes 2.0* (ODU), *Twelfth Night* (Red Clay Theater), *I’m With Mauricio* (INTAR), *Me and My Girl* (Village Light Opera), *Turn Four* by Crystal Skillman (Avant Pop Productions), *The Front Page* (Plays and Players), *Bob...* by Jake Hooker (Ontological), *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (Winner Best Production, 2000, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette), *Titus Andronicus* (AYLI Productions), *Ritual of Faith* (OTG Productions), *The Vampires* (HRST), *Fat Men In Skirts* (AYLI Productions, winner best actress ACTF and closing night selection), *Eyes of a Blue Dog* (AYLI Productions), *And Baby Makes Seven* (Unseen Theater Company), *The Mikado* (HRGSP). He is the recipient of a Peter Sellars Directing Award, a Drama Clan Award, a John Pasquin Fellowship and is an alumn of the LCT



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Director's Lab '06. He was a Kenneth Frankel Directing Fellow at MTC and is a Drama League Directing Fellow. 2001-2006: Artistic Director of The Immediate Theater Company (theimmediatetheater.org). B.A.: Harvard University MFA: Carnegie Mellon University.

e'Marcus Harper (*Musical Director*) resides in the Washington, DC Metropolitan area and studied Music Composition/Theory at Howard University; conceived and wrote *Great Songs, 3 Singers, and a Band*; composed the score for the US premiere of *da Kink in my hair* by Trey Anthony and received a Grammy Award Nomination for *Love Alive V: Walter Hawkins and the Love Center Choir 25th Reunion*. TV/Recordings/Tour credits include: Carlos Santana, Tramaine, Lionel Ritchie, Micheal Jackson, Aretha Franklin, Dr. Mattie Moss Clark, The Hawkins, Billy Preston, and Li'l Richard. Score/MD/Acting Credits include: *Sirens*/Ira Aldridge Theater in DC; *Rhinoceros*/Ira Aldridge Theater; *Dreamgirls*/Shouson Theater in Hong Kong; *God's Trombones*/Howard University; and *Crowns* at The Alliance, The Goodman, Arena Stage, Studio Arena, San Diego Rep, Manitoba Theater Co, CanStage, and The National Theatre in Canada.

Tamika Steeley (*Choreographer*) an award winning choreographer and teacher whose works have been commissioned by the Governor's School for the Arts, Old Dominion University and various studios throughout the Hampton roads area. She began her training when she was twelve years old at the Old Donation Center for the Gifted and Talented. She then continued her training at the Governor's School for the Arts. In 2001, she received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Dance Performance and Choreography at Old Dominion University, where she was the two time recipient of the Eva Morris Gregory Dance Scholarship. Upon receiving her degree, she joined the staff of Old Dominion University as a dance instructor. She has choreographed for numerous events such as the Umoja Festival and the Tim Reid Norfolk State Celebrity Golf Tournament, where she opened in 1992, for James Brown. She also choreographed and performed for radio station 103 jamz's Jamzfest, where she opened for several artists such as the Roots, Dave Hollister, and Missy Elliott. She is a member of two of the areas most prominent dance companies: Second Wind Dance Company, which she joined in 1999 and is a principal dancer, and Todd Rosenlieb Dance Company. She is currently teaching in the cities of Portsmouth, Newport News, Hampton, and Chesapeake while developing her own dance company with her sister Nikia Burks.

Anita Tripathi Easterling (*Set Designer*) is pleased to be designing again for the Virginia Stage Company. In the

past, Anita has designed numerous sets for VSC including: *A Christmas Carol, Of Mice and Men, Vincent in Brixton, Private Lives and Greetings!*. Various other design credits include: *Life Is A Dream* (Old Dominion University); *Proof, Honky Tonk Angels*, and *Old Wicked Songs* (Greenbrier Valley Theatre); *King Lear* and *As You Like It* (Virginia Shakespeare Festival), *Ten Little Indians* and *Guys and Dolls* (Regent University). In New York, Anita assisted David Gallo with model making for *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and has worked regionally as a Scenic Charge and Props Master. Anita holds an M.F.A. in Scene Design from the University of South Carolina. She is currently the Lecturer in Scene Design at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte. Anita is a member of United Scenic Artists, Local 829.

Jeni Schaeffer (*Costume Designer*) is thrilled to be a part of the Virginia Stage Company family for her fifth season as Resident Costume Designer and Costume Shop Manager. Jeni holds an MAC in Costume Design from Wichita State University and has designed over 25 productions including the Virginia Stage Company productions of *Drawer Boy, Yellow Man, A Christmas Carol, Driving Miss Daisy, The Taste Test* and *Of Mice and Men*. Jeni would like to thank Chris and Keith for giving her the opportunity to continue to grow as an artist and her husband Tony for always believing in her talents. She would also like to thank her beautiful little girl Sara for playing dress up and helping me color "pretty pictures."

A. Nelson Ruger IV (*Lighting Designer*) is happy to be joining Virginia Stage Company this year as the Resident Lighting Designer and Production Manager, as well as enjoying a successful career as a theatrical scenic and lighting designer at theatres across the United States. Credits include lighting for VSC's productions of *Of Mice and Men, Treasure Island, Vaudeville*, and *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. Other credits include designs for The Savoy Company, Syracuse Stage, The Redhouse, Queens Theatre In The Park, Surflight Theatre, Old Dominion University, Opera Delaware, Lincoln Square Theatre, Muhlenberg College, Proper Villains Theatre Company, as well as over a dozen productions at Circa '21 Playhouse. He is an alumnus of Muhlenberg College, holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in Lighting and Scenic Design from Syracuse University and is a former faculty member at Millikin University and Syracuse University.

Michael Boso (Sound Designer) returns for his second season with Virginia Stage Company as Sound Engineer. Last season Michael designed sound for VSC's *Contact*,



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A Christmas Carol, The Taste Test, and Wiley and the Hairy Man, as well as *Galileo* for the Virginia Governor's School for the Arts Theatre Department. At Louisville's Kentucky Shakespeare Festival, Michael recently designed sound for productions of *As you Like It, Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth*, and *The Comedie of Errors*. Other recent designs include *Checking In, Stop Kiss, a.m. Sunday*, and *Art* at Actors Guild of Lexington (KY). Michael studied his craft as Audio Engineer of Lexington's volunteer, community-run acoustic music productions of the *Troubadour Concert Series* and as Assistant Audio Engineer of the internationally syndicated live-audience folk music radio show, *Woodsongs Old-Time Radio Hour*.

Anthony Hailey (*Drummer*) is a native of Charlotte, NC. Dr. W. Anthony Hailey is an expert in several fields of World Percussion. Hailey completed his undergraduate studies at East Carolina University and received his Masters and Doctoral degrees from West Virginia University with emphasis on world music. An active performer in Hampton Roads, Hailey has performed locally with many artists including the Girls Choir of Harlem, Dance Theater of Harlem and Ben Vereen. He has also presented various world music lectures, workshops and recitals in partnership with the Arts Within Reach Artist Series and Virginia Wesleyan College. Recently Hailey was appointed Associate Professor in the Department of Music at Old Dominion University.

Bradley C. Cooper (*Stage Manager*) is happy to be returning to Virginia Stage Company for his fourth season. Crowns will be his 9th production as an Equity Stage Manager with VSC. He spent this past summer in Sacramento working for the California Music Circus. He will also be Stage Managing *A Christmas Carol, Indoor/Outdoor*, and *To Kill A Mockingbird* this season for VSC. Past favorites at VSC include *Driving Miss Daisy, Of Mice And Men, and Contact*. Bradley is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association.