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News Release

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**Richmond Jazz Society and Virginia Repertory Theatre Announce
Ella at 100
Celebrating the Centennial Birthday of Jazz Legend Ella Fitzgerald**

Featuring Desirée Roots

Richmond, VA -- The Richmond Jazz Society and Virginia Repertory Theatre announce *Ella at 100*, April 25, 2017, 7:00 P.M. at the Sara Belle and Neil November Theatre, 114 West Broad Street. This momentous evening of jazz will celebrate the 100th birthday of Ella Fitzgerald, a Newport News native. Hundreds of events are taking place around the world to celebrate her legacy this spring. The Richmond event falls on Fitzgerald's actual birthday.

Born April 25, 1917, in Newport News, Ella Fitzgerald was one of the greatest Jazz singers of all time. "The First Lady of Song" delighted audiences around the world for over 60 years, sold over 40 million albums, and received numerous awards and honors, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Under the music direction of **James Gates**, the performance with two acts will feature award winning Jazz singer and actor, **Desirée Roots** as Ella Fitzgerald. She will perform Fitzgerald's most noted songs accompanied by fourteen of the region's most acclaimed Jazz musicians. Joining her on stage will be **Scott Wichmann** as Frank Sinatra, **Billy Dye** as Louis Armstrong, and **Anthony Cosby** as Nat "King" Cole. The event will raise funds to support the community programs of Richmond Jazz Society and Virginia Rep.

Roots has been an active member of both the jazz and theatre communities for decades. Recent Virginia Rep credits include lead roles as Effie in *Dreamgirls*, Sofia in *The Color Purple*, and Caroline in *Caroline or Change* (RTCC Award Best Actress in a Musical) in partnership with Cadence Theatre Company. She is the recipient of the Theresa Pollack Award for vocal excellence in the arts. Roots has been the opening act for such internationally known performers as B. B. King, Kenny Garrett, Bobby Watson, Art Porter, Gerald Albright, Leslie Uggams, and Bill Cosby. Her first Jazz CD, *Don't Ever Stop Dreaming*, was released in 2015.

Scott Wichmann, Billy Dye, and Anthony Knowles Cosby have all worked with Roots in numerous theatre productions. Wichmann and Roots shared the stage in *Ella and Her Fella Frank*. Wichmann's recent theatre credits include John Adams in *1776* and Black Stache in *Peter and the Starcatcher*. Billy Dye and Anthony Cosby joined Roots in the casts of *The Color Purple* and *Dreamgirls*.

Music Director and saxophonist, **James "Saxsmo" Gates**, will lead the all star jazz orchestra of fourteen, many of whom perform internationally. Gates is the Director of Jazz at Virginia State University and has performed with Art Blakey, Larry Carlton, Jeff Lorber, Alex Bugnon, Cyrus Chestnut, Chris Botti, and many others. His latest album is *Gates Wide Open*.

Musicians

Piano - Dr. W. Weldon Hill

Bass - Michael Hawkins

Drums - Billy Williams

Guitar - Carl Lester El

Saxophones:

James "Saxsmo" Gates

Dexter Moses

Kevin Simpson

Stephen Norfleet

Trumpets:

Victor Haskins

Keith Willingham

Trombones:

Chris Leitch

Charles Newton

Philip Jones

Ticket Information

Box Office 804-282-2620

www.virginiarep.org

Tickets: \$35 - \$100

Limited Patron Tickets at \$250. Includes reception with Desiree and band on stage after the show.

The Sara Belle and Neil November Theatre is equipped with a state-of-the-art induction loop hearing system that is compatible with all telecoil-equipped hearing aids and cochlear implants. A handheld receiver and headphone system is also available free of charge for anyone who is hearing impaired.

Valet parking will be available for \$8 and free self-park will be available within blocks of the theatre.

About Richmond Jazz Society

Richmond Jazz Society has served as Virginia's Jazz service organization for the last 37 years in the education, preservation and advancement of Jazz as an American art form. It achieves its mission via educational programs, performances, exhibits, publications and preservation projects. RJS annually produces its Guest Educators Concert Series featuring nationally and internationally renowned Jazz legends and rising stars. In addition to its outreach programs, RJS administers the Joseph J. Kennedy, Jr. Jazz Scholarship Award awarded to students studying Jazz at Virginia colleges and universities.

About Virginia Repertory Theatre

Virginia Repertory Theatre is the regional professional theatre in Richmond, Virginia. With a budget of \$5 million, four distinct venues, an educational touring arm, and an

annual audience over 530,000, Virginia Rep is one of the largest performing arts organizations in Central Virginia. Virginia Rep stages four seasons annually: the Signature Season at the Sara Belle and Neil November Theatre, Theatre Gym Season in partnership with Cadence Theatre Company, Virginia Rep's Children's Season at Willow Lawn, and the Hanover Tavern Season.