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NORTHLIGHT THEATRE PRESENTS
THE CHICAGO PREMIERE OF *ELLA*.
CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND MUSIC OF JAZZ GREAT ELLA FITZGERALD

Chicago, IL— **Northlight Theatre** continues its 33rd season, celebrating Artistic Director BJ Jones' 10th Anniversary season, with the Midwest premiere of *Ella*, book by **Jeffrey Hatcher**, conceived by **Rob Ruggiero** and **Dyke Garrison**. The production, directed by Rob Ruggiero, runs **November 28, 2007-January 6, 2008**, at Northlight Theatre, 9501 Skokie Blvd in Skokie. **The production opens on Wednesday, December 5, 2007, at 7:30 p.m.**

Northlight has a tradition of producing musicals about the American experience, most recently *Fire on the Mountain*, *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues* and *Dinah Was*. In *Ella*, the year is 1966 and the place is a concert stage in Nice on the French Riviera. Ella Fitzgerald, "The First Lady of Song," rehearses for an upcoming concert to be taped for posterity. Her producer requests that she add more "patter" about her life to the show. With this daunting task before her she begins to reminisce, uncovering a past the public never knew. This theatrical event weaves myth and memory, mystery and music, and features more than 20 of her greatest hits, including "That Old Black Magic" and "They Can't Take That Away From Me". *Ella* will take you inside the heart and soul of one of the world's greatest jazz singers.

"With *Ella*, Northlight continues its tradition of producing joyous American musical pieces reflecting our audience's passion for jazz and blues," says Artistic Director BJ Jones. "Chicago legend E. Faye Butler, leads an all-Chicago cast to bring to life the story of an American legend."

The cast features **E. Faye Butler** (Ella); **Anderson Edwards** (piano/conductor) **Walter Kindred** (percussion), **John Whitfield** (bass), **David Parkes** (Norman) and **Ron Haynes** (trumpet).

The designers are **Michael Schweikardt** (scenic), **John Lasiter** (lighting), **Alejo Vietti** (costume), **Michael C. Miceli** (sound), and **Charles LaPointe** (wig design). **George Caldwell** is the music director and **Kristi J. Martens** is the stage manager.

Rob Ruggiero (Director/Co-conceiver) is a freelance professional director and the Associate Artistic Director at TheaterWorks in Hartford, Connecticut, where, over the course of 13 years, he has directed many critically acclaimed productions. He made his off-Broadway debut directing *All Under Heaven*, which also toured nationally, including successful runs in Florida and Los Angeles. Mr. Ruggiero's body of work includes both plays and musicals and his productions have been seen in numerous regional theatres around the country, including Pittsburgh Public, Barrington Stage, Great Lakes Theater Festival, The Muny and The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, where his hugely successful revival of *Take Me Out* received nine Kevin Kline nominations and won three, including Best Director of a Play. *Ella*, which began its development at Florida Stage, has since been seen at a number of regional theatres around the country.

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Dyke Garrison (*Co-Conceiver*) wrote his first produced play, *They Also Serve*, as a Shubert Playwright Fellow at Occidental College. He went on to write a number of shorter pieces, which have been seen at One Act Theatre, The Marsh and The Guild Theatre, among others. His full-length works include *Meadow in the Sky*, *The Finish Line*, *Shall We Dance* and *Dead Languages*. His musical *What's on Tonight?* was produced on San Francisco's own Broadway and his one man-show for Kevin Dixon, *All Present*, appeared at Theatre Rhinoceros. His one-woman show about Pearl S. Buck, *All Under Heaven*, written for and with Valerie Harper, premiered at Ms. Buck's alma mater, Randolph Macon, and went on to productions in New York, Los Angeles and Florida. Mr. Garrison has studied playwriting with Sam Shepard and Oskar Eustis. He is a member of Playwrights Lab of San Francisco and former President of the Board of Directors for the Playwrights Foundation.

Jeffrey Hatcher (*Playwright*) co-authored *Tuesdays with Morrie* (with Mitch Albom) which appeared at Northlight in 2003. He authored the book for the Broadway musical *Never Gonna Dance*, and penned the Off-Broadway productions *Three Viewings*, *A Picasso*, *Scotland Road*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, *Murder by Poe*, *Neddy* and *Fellow Travelers*. His plays – including *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*, *Murderers*, *Mercy of a Storm*, *Smash*, *To Fool the Eye*, and *Work Song* (with Eric Simonson) – have been seen at such theatres as Yale Rep, The Old Globe, South Coast Rep, Seattle Rep, Denver Center Theatre Company, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and dozens more in the US and abroad. Mr. Hatcher wrote the screenplays for *Stage Beauty* and *Casanova*, and has authored episodes of the Peter Falk series *Columbo*. He is a member and/or alumnus of The Playwrights' Center, The Dramatists Guild of America, Writers Guild of America and New Dramatists.

E. Faye Butler (*Ella*) was last seen at Northlight in *Dinah Was* in 1999. She most recently completed a successful run of *Trouble In Mind* at Yale Repertory and Centerstage. National and Regional Tours include *Mamma Mia*, *Dinah Was*, *Ain't Misbehavin*, *Nunsense*, *Nunsense 2*, and *Don't Bother Me*. She has worked at New York Film and Play Festival, Signature Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Marriott Lincolnshire Theatre, Centerstage, Pasadena Playhouse, The Goodman, Arena Stage, Steppenwolf, Christmas Carol, Court Theatre, Mercury Theatre, Royal George Theatre, Sacramento Music Theatre, Victory Gardens, Arkansas Repertory, Drury Lane Theatre, and Ivanhoe Theatre, among others. She is the recipient of 5 Joseph Jefferson Awards, 2 Black Theatre Alliance Awards, an After Dark Award, a John Barrymore Award, a RAMI Award, 3 Helen Hayes Nominations, an Excellence In Arts Award, and an Ovations Nomination.

David Parkes (*Norman*) is a company member of Chicago's TimeLine Theatre where his work includes the roles of George Washington in *The General from America*, Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*, Lambert LaRue in *Pravda*, Martin Heidegger in *Hannah and Martin* (After Dark Award), Howard DaSilva in *It's All True*, Henry II in *The Lion in Winter*, Moe Axlerod in *Awake and Sing*, John Proctor in *The Crucible* (After Dark Award), Mr. Manningham in *Gaslight*, and Warden Whalen in the Chicago premiere of Tennessee Williams' *Not About Nightingales* for which he received a Joseph Jefferson citation. Other work in Chicago includes Steppenwolf Theatre's production of Tennessee Williams' *One Arm* directed by Moises Kauffman, as well as productions with American Theatre Company, Eclipse, Apple Tree, Streetsigns, Footsteps, greasy joan, and Piven Theatre Workshop.

Anderson "Sonny" Edwards (*Piano/Conductor*) is a multi-instrumentalist who gave his first recital at the age of 5. He has played keyboards and bass with Koko Taylor since 1991, recorded with Japanese artist Tyler on her album *Hipster*, composed and scored the film *Wedding Bell Blues*, and has performed solo and with numerous other American and Japanese artists. He has worked at theaters such as ETA, Black Ensemble Theater (*Don't Shed a Tear: The Billie Holiday Story*, *Memphis Soul: The Story of Stax Records*), Goodman, and Northlight (Musical Director – *Thunder Knocking on the Door*). He continued with *Thunder* to the Guthrie, Cincinnati Playhouse and Arena Stage in Washington, DC, where he won the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Musical Direction. He has instructed music with the Chicago Park District, Columbia College, Chicago Board of Education, and the Chicago Academy of the Arts. He holds a certificate in Sound Engineering and a B.A. in Music Performance from Columbia College.

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Ron Haynes (*Trumpet*) was born and raised on the West Side of Chicago and began his musical career while still in his teens, gigging with blues artists like Tyrone Davis, Otis Clay and Artie "Blues Boy" White. He attended Shaw University and later North Carolina Central University, where he studied under jazz great Donald Byrd. Known for his work with Liquid Soul, the Ohio Players, Jazz Friends (house band at the Cotton Club), Bernie Mac (horn section leader on HBO's *Midnight Mac with Bernie Mac*), Lucky Peterson and Lenny Kravitz (member of the horn section since 2005), Ron is an accomplished bandleader and has played with countless bands in Chicago and around the world. He recorded four albums with Liquid Soul, including the Grammy-nominated *Here's the Deal*, and has released two CDs as a solo artist. His most recent release is *2 Man Crew*, featuring original compositions by Ron and drummer Vic Baker Sr.

Walter Kindred (*Percussion*) began studying piano at age eight and drums at age eleven, continuing on to Vandercook College of Music and the American Conservatory of Music, where he later taught tap drumming (1971-72) for James Dutton. He has performed, recorded and toured with various artists playing vibes, congas and trap drums, and played vibes and percussion on Broadway for *Bubbling Brown Sugar* and *Your Arms too Short to Box with God*. He has performed around the country with artists such as Von Freeman, George Freeman, Chico Freeman, Max Roach, Johnny Hartman, Sonny Stitt, Gene Ammons, AACM, Pete Cosy, Verdin White, Larry Ball, Lewis Ball, Ari Brown, Vandy Harris, and Wayne Bennett, and in the Chicago area with local artists such as Ari Brown, Paula Greer, Sonny Seals, Karl Johnson, and the Note Benders Big Band. He has appeared in the musicals *Billy Ekstine*, *Chicago Golden Soul*, and *Memory Lane*.

John Whitfield (*Bass*) began playing piano at the age of five, and picked up the French horn and bass while in high school. Over the years he has played with great artists including Peggy Lee, Sammy Davis, Billy Ekstein, and others too numerous to mention. He was the bassist in the house bands at Drury Lane Evergreen Park and the Palmer House in downtown Chicago.

Danny Holgate (*Musical Arrangements*) Broadway: Musical Director and Arranger for *Don't Bother Me – I Can't Cope* and *Bubbling Brown Sugar*; Musical Supervision and Arrangements for *Eubie*, *Guys and Dolls* (revival), *Rainbow Jones*; and Dance Arranger for *Odyssey* and *It's Nice To Be Civilized*. Mr. Holgate also performed the role of Jimmy Powers in *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* in New York and was the Musical Supervisor and Arranger for the show. Pre-Broadway shows include *Daddy Goodness*, *Two Faces of Africa*, *Golden Boy* (revival), *Stringbean*, *Sweet and Hot*, *Aretha – Queen of Soul*, *Blackbirds of Broadway*, *Cookin' at the Cookery* and a revival of *Storyville*. For the past 20 years, he has been a vocal coach, put together club acts or arrangements for various performers, and for many years was the Conductor and Arranger for the legendary Cab Calloway.

Tickets for ***Ella*** range in price from \$38- \$58 and are available by phone, (847) 673-6300, or online at www.northlight.org. The box office is located at the **North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Boulevard, in Skokie**. Box office hours are Monday-Friday 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., and Saturdays 12:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. On performance days, the box office hours are extended through showtime. The box office is closed on Sundays, except on performance days when it is open two hours prior to showtime.

PLEASE NOTE CURTAIN TIMES: Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. (except December 25 and January 1); Wednesdays at 1:00 p.m. (except November 28 and December 5) and 7:30 p.m.; Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. (except January 3) Fridays at 8:00 p.m.; Saturdays at 2:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.; Sundays at 2:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. (December 2, December 30 and January 6 only).

Northlight Theatre is supported in part by generous contributions from: The Allyn Foundation; The Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation; The Chicago Tribune Foundation; ComEd; Patrick and Anna M. Cudahy Fund; Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; LaSalle Bank; The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; The Margolis Firm, PC; National Endowment for the Arts; Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Young People's Programming Endowment; Northern Trust Charitable Trust; Polk Bros. Foundation; Dr. Scholl Foundation; The Shubert Foundation; Skokie Fine Arts Commission; Target Corporation; and The Chicago Community Trust.

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Northlight embarks upon its 33rd season in 2007-08 as the fourth largest non-profit theatre in Chicago. Dedicated to enhancing the cultural life of the North Shore and Chicago, Northlight presents theatrical works which reflect and challenge the values and beliefs of the community it serves while continuing to grow its reputation for launching world premieres, new musicals, heartwarming plays and intelligent dramas.

In its 33-year history, the organization has mounted over 150 productions, including over 32 world premieres, and garnered 132 Joseph Jefferson Award nominations and 24 Awards. As one of the area's premier theatre companies, Northlight is a regional magnet for critical and professional acclaim, as well as talent of the highest quality. For more information on *Ella* and Northlight Theatre, visit www.northlight.org.

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Ella / FACT SHEET

Synopsis: In *Ella*, the year is 1966 and the place is a concert stage in Nice on the French Riviera. Ella Fitzgerald, "The First Lady of Song," rehearses for an upcoming concert to be taped for posterity. Her producer requests that she add more "patter" about her life to the show. With this daunting task before her she begins to reminisce, uncovering a past the public never knew. This theatrical event weaves myth and memory, mystery and music, and features more than 20 of her greatest hits, including "That Old Black Magic" and "They Can't Take That Away From Me". *Ella* will take you inside the heart and soul of one of the world's greatest jazz singers.

Title: ***Ella***
Playwright: **Book by Jeffrey Hatcher
Conceived by Rob Ruggiero and Dyke Garrison**
Directed by: **Rob Ruggiero**
Featuring: **E. Faye Butler (*Ella*), Walter Kindred (*percussion*), Anderson Edwards (piano/conductor), John Whitfield (*bass*), David Parkes (*Norman-Ella's Manager*) and Ron Haynes (*trumpet*).**

Dates: **Previews:** November 28-December 4, 2007
Press opening: Wednesday, December 5, 2007 at 7:30 p.m.
Regular run: December 6, 2007-January 6, 2008

Schedule: **Tuesdays:** 7:30 p.m. (except December 25 and January 1)
Wednesdays: 1:00 p.m. (except November 28 and December 5) and 7:30 p.m.
Thursdays: 7:30 p.m. (except January 3)
Fridays: 8:00 p.m.
Saturdays: 2:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.
Sundays: 2:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. (December 2, December 30 and January 6 only)

Location: **Northlight Theatre** is located at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Blvd, Skokie.

Tickets: Previews: \$38- \$52
Regular run: \$38- \$58
Opening night, December 5, 2007: \$60, which includes a post-show reception with the cast.

Box Office: The Box Office is located at **9501 Skokie Blvd, Skokie.**
(847) 673-6300; www.northlight.org

Notes of Interest:

- E. Faye Butler was last seen at Northlight in *Dinah Was* for which she received a Jeff Award for Best Actress in a Musical for her portrayal of Blues legend Dinah Washington.
- Ella Fitzgerald, also known as "Lady Ella" and the "First Lady of Song", is considered one of the most influential jazz vocalists of the 20th Century. With a vocal range spanning three octaves, she was most known for her purity of tone, faultless phrasing and intonation. She is widely considered to have been one of the supreme interpreters of the Great American Songbook.
- Over a recording career that lasted fifty-seven years, Ella Fitzgerald was the winner of thirteen Grammy Awards, and was awarded the National Medal of Art by Ronald Reagan and the Presidential Medal of Freedom by George H. W. Bush.

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