SANAA LATHAN IS VERA STARK
IN PULITZER PRIZE WINNER LYNN NOTTAGE’S
WEST COAST PREMIERE

A cclaimed C ast A lso F eatures K evin C arroll, M erle D andridge, A manda D etmer, S pence G arrett, K imberly H ébert G regory and M ather Z ickel
H elmed by O bie A ward W inner J o Bonney
O pening N ight S eptember 26, 2012

LOS ANGELES, July 26, 2012 — Stage and screen star Sanaa Lathan (A Raisin in the Sun, Contagion) returns to the title role in Pulitzer Prize winner Lynn Nottage’s By the Way, Meet Vera Stark for its West Coast premiere at the Geffen Playhouse. Lathan, who originated the character of Vera Stark in the critically acclaimed New York run, will once again take the stage as the 1930’s era maid turned movie star, reunited with original cast member Kimberly Hébert Gregory (Spike Lee’s Red Hook Summer) reprising her role as fellow aspiring African American actress Lottie. Broadway vet and Geffen alum Merle Dandridge (Spamalot, Rent, Aida) will take on the spicy role of Anna Mae, who fakes a Brazilian accent for a slice of fame, and former leading lady of ABC’s Man Up, Amanda Detmer, will portray Gloria Mitchell, the white starlet dubbed “America’s little sweetie pie” and Vera’s first employer. Helmed by award-winning director Jo Bonney, the West Coast premiere cast also features Kevin Carroll (Paid in Full, Being John Malkovich), Spencer Garrett (Iron Man 3, Air Force One) and Geffen alum Mather Zickel (Extraordinary Chambers, Rachel Getting Married).

It’s Hollywood’s heyday and the streets of Los Angeles are filled with glitz, glamour and the chance at stardom — that is as long as you have the “right” look. But when former maid Vera Stark lands a groundbreaking role in a new Southern epic, she turns Hollywood on its head and paves the way for future generations of black actresses. More than five decades later, Vera’s influence on race, film and feminism has seeped its way into pop-culture. But who is the real Vera Stark? Part comedy and part commentary, By the Way, Meet Vera Stark uses today’s fascination with celebrity and controversy to get to the truth behind the legend.

By the Way, Meet Vera Stark had its world premiere in 2011 at Second Stage Theatre in New York. The Geffen Playhouse production marks the West Coast premiere.

By the Way, Meet Vera Stark begins in previews in the Gil Cates Theater at the Geffen Playhouse on September 18, 2012 and officially opens on Wednesday, September 26, 2012. Special events during the run of By the Way, Meet Vera Stark include the theater’s Signature Series performances for no additional cost. These evenings include an intellectual, thought-provoking post show Q&A at Talk Back Tuesdays; a scintillating, one-of-a-kind after-party at Girls Night Out; a cultural happy hour with Lounge Fridays and complimentary wine tastings during Wine Down Sundays. For more information, please view www.geffenplayhouse.com/meetvera.
**BY THE WAY, MEET VERA STARK**

Written by Lynn Nottage
Directed by Jo Bonney

**Preview Performances:** Tuesday, September 18 – Tuesday, September 25, 2012

**Opening Night:** Wednesday, September 26, 2012

**Closing Night:** Sunday, October 28, 2012

**Cast**
- Kevin Carroll
- Merle Dandridge
- Amanda Detmer
- Spencer Garrett
- Kimberly Hébert Gregory
- Sanaa Lathan
- Mather Zickel
- Leroy Barksdale / Herb Forrester
- Anna Mae / Afua Assata Ejobo
- Gloria Mitchell
- Fredrick Slasvick / Brad Donovan
- Lottie / Carmen Levy-Green
- Vera Stark
- Maximillian Von Oster / Peter Rhys-Davies

**Performance Schedule**
- **Monday:** No performances
- **Tuesday – Friday:** 8:00pm
- **Saturday:** 3:00pm; 8:00pm
- **Sunday:** 2:00pm; 7:00pm

**Ticket Info**
Ticket prices currently range from $37 to $57 for preview performances and from $47 to $77 for the regular run. Tickets are available in-person at the Geffen Playhouse box office, via phone at 310-208-5454 or online at www.geffenplayhouse.com.

**Biographies**

**KEVIN CARROLL** (%28Leroy Barksdale / Herb Forrester%29)

**MERLE DANDRIDGE** (%28Anna Mae / Afua Assata Ejobo%29)
Merle Dandridge’s acting career began in New York City where she received her Master of Fine Arts from NYU. Following graduation Dandridge went straight to the stag e working at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis where she starred in productions of *Amadeus* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. She has since become a familiar face on-screen. On television, she most recently starred as Brenda Hayden in the ABC comedy *Man Up* and enjoyed a recurring arc on * Necessary Roughness*. Other television credits include a series lead on ABC’s *What About Brian* and a recurring role on *Private Practice*. Amanda has also been seen in films such as *Saving Silverman*, *Big Fat Liar*, *Final Destination* and *The Majestic*.

**AMANDA DETMER** (%28Gloria Mitchell%29)
Amanda Detmer’s acting career began in New York City where she received her Master of Fine Arts from NYU. Following graduation Detmer went straight to the stage, working at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis where she starred in productions of *Amadeus* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. She has since become a familiar face on-screen. On television, she most recently starred as Brenda Hayden in the ABC comedy *Man Up* and enjoyed a recurring arc on * Necessary Roughness*. Other television credits include a series lead on ABC’s *What About Brian* and a recurring role on *Private Practice*. Amanda has also been seen in films such as *Saving Silverman*, *Big Fat Liar*, *Final Destination* and *The Majestic*.

**SPENCER GARRETT** (%28Fredrick Slasvick / Brad Donovan%29)
Spencer Garrett is pleased and proud to make his Geffen Playhouse debut with this production. Theater credits include: *Broadway Roots and Wings* and *American Dream* (Circle in the Square), Off Broadway and regional: *Gunplay*, *Election* (Naked Angels), *Crazy Eights* (Echo Theatre Company), *In the Moonlight Eddie and Alone Together* (Pasadena Playhouse), *The Real Thing* (L.C.T), *Heartbreak* (Hudson Guild-Dramalogue Award Best Actor), *Big Fat Liar*, *Final Destination* and *The Majestic*. -more-

**KIMBERLY HÉBERT GREGORY** (Lottie / Carmen Levy-Green)
Kimberly is delighted to revisit this piece as her Geffen Playhouse debut. She can be seen in Spike Lee's summer film, Red Hook Summer, as Sister Sweet. Her theatrical credits include: The Public Theatre: The Brother/Sister Plays, where she played Aunt Elegua and Shun; Second Stage: By the Way, Meet Vera Stark; Hartford Stage: Antony and Cleopatra (Starring Kate Mulgrew) and Gees Bend; The McCarter Theatre: The Brother/Sister Plays; The Magic Theatre: Tough Titty by Oni Faida Lampley; The 1st National NY Irish Theatre Festival: a notable one-woman piece entitled Evangeline Elsewhere; and the national tour of the Broadway hit, The Lion King.

**SANAA LATHAN** (Vera Stark)
Tony Award nominated actress, Sanaa Lathan delivers a striking presence and undeniable energy to every project she takes on. She can currently be seen in season two of the Starz series Boss opposite Kelsey Grammer. Lathan received rave reviews as well as winning the Lortel Award and receiving a Drama Desk Award nomination for her portrayal of the title role in By the Way, Meet Vera Stark at the Second Stage Theatre in Manhattan. She starred as Maggie the Cat in the West End’s award-winning revival of Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. Lathan reprised her Tony-nominated role as Beneatha Younger in the critically acclaimed ABC production of A Raisin in the Sun. Her additional feature credits include Steven Soderbergh’s Contagion, Something New, Alien Versus Predator, Brown Sugar, The Best Man and Love and Basketball for which she received a best actress NAACP Image Award. Currently she is lending her voice to the Fox animated show The Cleveland Show.

**MATHER ZICKEL** (Maximillian Von Oster / Peter Rhys-Davies)
Mather Zickel hails from New York City where he studied acting at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and The Shakespeare Lab at the Public Theatre. He spent fifteen years performing in many New York experimental venues, working with some of America's most creative young playwrights such as Sarah Ruhl, Gina Gionfriddo, and Adam Bock. Since then, Mather has appeared in a wide variety of film and television roles. Some of his favorites are Kieran in Rachel Getting Married (Sony Classic), District Attorney Mike Powers in Reno: 911! (Comedy Central) and in the series Man Up for ABC. Mather is currently shooting the lead role in the series Newsreaders for Adult Swim, which is a spin-off to the wildly popular series Children’s Hospital.

**LYNN NOTTAGE** (Playwright)
Lynn Nottage is a playwright from Brooklyn. Her play Ruined enjoyed successful runs at Manhattan Theatre Club, the Goodman Theatre and the Geffen Playhouse and won several awards including the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Obie Award. Her plays, which have been developed and produced at theaters both nationally and internationally, also include Intimate Apparel (New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award); Fabulation or The Re-Education of Undine (Obie Award); Crumbs from the Table of Joy; Las Meninas; Mud, River, Stone; Por’knockers; and Poof!. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2007 MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant," the National Black Theatre Festival’s August Wilson Playwriting Award, the 2004 PEN/Laura Pels Award for Drama, the 2005 Guggenheim Grant for Playwriting, as well as fellowships from the Lucille Lortel Foundation, Manhattan Theatre Club, New Dramatists and New York Foundation for the Arts. She sits on The Dramatists Guild Council, an alumna of New Dramatists and New York Foundation for the Arts. She studied acting at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and The Shakespeare Lab at the Public Theatre. He spent fifteen years performing in many New York experimental venues, working with some of America's most creative young playwrights such as Sarah Ruhl, Gina Gionfriddo, and Adam Bock. Since then, Mather has appeared in a wide variety of film and television roles. Some of his favorites are Kieran in Rachel Getting Married (Sony Classic), District Attorney Mike Powers in Reno: 911! (Comedy Central) and in the series Man Up for ABC. Mather is currently shooting the lead role in the series Newsreaders for Adult Swim, which is a spin-off to the wildly popular series Children’s Hospital.

**JO BONNEY** (Director)
ABOUT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE
The Geffen Playhouse has been a hub of the Los Angeles theater scene since opening its doors in 1995. Noted for its intimacy and celebrated for its world-renowned mix of classic and contemporary plays, provocative new works and second productions, the Geffen Playhouse continues to present a body of work that has garnered national recognition. Named in honor of entertainment mogul and philanthropist David Geffen, who made the initial donation to the theater, the company was founded by Gilbert Cates, and is currently helmed by Artistic Director Randall Arney, Managing Director Ken Novice and Chairman of the Board Frank Mancuso. Proudly associated with UCLA, the Geffen Playhouse welcomes an audience of more than 130,000 each year, and maintains an extensive education and outreach program, designed to engage young people and the community at large in the arts. For more information, please visit geffenplayhouse.com.

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