



Eastern Connecticut State University

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

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Actor Mel Johnson to Perform at Eastern

Willimantic, Conn. – Veteran actor Mel Johnson, Jr. will collaborate with writer/director Tom Dugan on Feb. 12 to present “Frederick Douglass: In the Shadow of Slavery.” The performance will take place at 7 p. m. in Shafer Auditorium in Shafer Hall, located at the corner of Windham and Valley Streets in Willimantic.

Johnson’s performance is the fourth in this year’s popular 2007-2008 Arts and Lecture Series, which has already brought The Capitol Steps, The Eroica Trio and ocean explorer Robert Ballard to campus.

This one-man performance chronicles the life of Frederick Douglass, one of the most important African American activists in U. S. history. From his childhood when he was born into slavery to his perilous escape to freedom, Douglass’s remarkable life has been used by educators at every level to teach the concept of freedom and justice for all.

An actor and film producer, Johnson most recently starred on Broadway in Maurice Hines’ production of *Hot Feet*. Other Broadway credits include Mufasa in *The Lion King*; *Jelly’s Last Jam*; *The Boys from Syracuse*; Bob Fosse’s *Big Deal*; *The Rink*, with Liza Minnelli and Chita Rivera; *Eubie!*; *On The Twentieth Century*; Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*; and *The Taming of the Shrew*; *Do Lord Remember Me*; and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead*.

Among Johnson’s notable filmwork was his role as Benny in *Total Recall*. He also appeared in *American Blue Note*, *Intimate Strangers*, and *In the Shadow of the Cobra*.

Television appearances include David Lynch's *On the Air*; *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*; *The Practice*; *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*; and the miniseries, *Liberty*.

In Los Angeles, Johnson served as the artistic director of the award-winning arts organization, *The Imagination Workshop*. Other directing credits include the Los Angeles production of *Give 'Em Hell, Harry*, starring Jason Alexander, and the national tour of *Robert E. Lee: Shades of Gray*, starring Tom Dugan.

Dugan and Johnson have been collaborating for 20 years. Dugan's first two plays, directed by Johnson — *Oscar to Oscar*, an autobiographical comedy, and the Civil War drama *Robert E. Lee: Shades of Gray* — received rave reviews. The latter continues to play to sold-out theatres across the country. *Frederick Douglass: In the Shadow of Slavery* marks a departure for the two, with Dugan in the director's chair and Johnson playing the title character.

Tickets for Arts and Lecture Series events are \$10 for the general public and can be reserved by calling (860) 465-4693 or emailing tickets@easternct.edu

Eastern Connecticut State University is part of the Connecticut State University (CSU) system and is the state's public liberal arts university. ECSU serves more than 5,000 students each year on its Willimantic campus.

It is the policy of Eastern Connecticut State University to ensure equal access to its events. If you are an individual with a disability and will need accommodations for this event, please contact the Office of University Relations at (860) 465-5735.

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