



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

651 ARTS Launches New Series LIVE @ 651 ARTS

With

WILD: a new ballet by Jeremy McQueen's Black Iris Project

**Presented by Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and
651 ARTS**

Live at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Thursday, March 17th at 7 PM

(New York, NY – March 7, 2022) – 651 ARTS, Brooklyn's premier institution for the African Diasporic performing arts will launch its newest series - LIVE @651 ARTS - with **WILD**, a new ballet from Emmy-nominated choreographer **Jeremy McQueen** and his Black Iris Project. Presented by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and 651 ARTS, **WILD** forms part of Carnegie Hall's Afrofuturism festival and will be performed live for one night only at the Schomburg Center on Thursday, March 17th at 7 pm. The performance will also be streamed via the Schomburg Center's livestream page. Inspired by past 651 ARTS programs, LIVE @651ARTS will feature premieres of live virtual, digital or print presentations. The new series will allow the institution to expand its artistic footprint and to further develop partnerships and collaborations with artists and other arts organizations.

Loosely inspired by Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* children's book, **WILD** follows a young boy's journey as he celebrates his 14th birthday while incarcerated. Frequently harnessing the power of his imagination, he transports himself to an alternate universe where he is not treated like a wild animal. This cutting-edge ballet utilizes physical movement to illustrate and honor the history of Black bodies moving through space while encountering oppression and transforms countless men's stories into an artistic dance work, intended to be a reclaiming of time, unity, space, and Black culture.

Leading the cast for **WILD** will be **William Roberson** (Camille A. Brown & Dancers) and also features **Fana Tesfagiorgis** (Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater). The performance will include portraits and stories compiled by **Richard Ross**, author of *Juvie Talk & Juvenile in Justice*, as well as original music from a host of emerging artistic voices including: internationally acclaimed singer/ songwriter **morgxn**, former *Hamilton* cast member **Phillip Johnson Richardson (Phil.)**, composer, vocalist, musician and mixed media artist **Chari Glogovac-Smith**, musician and producer **Mauricio Escamilla** and award-winning singer/songwriter **Brittany Campbell**. Illustrations and projection design for **WILD** were created by **Aria Feliciano** and **Brittany Bland**, respectively.

“Since its inception in 2016, The Black Iris Project has been committed to telling Black narratives through ballet, using art as a mirror to reflect the times and consistently intertwining themes of social justice in everything we do. As someone who has worked to break through many doors in the world of dance, particularly ballet, I feel it is our duty as artists to be a catalyst for those that are unheard, unseen, and undervalued,” said McQueen. “I am committed to, now more than ever, dismantling those barriers through my art. This fervent effort stems from the need to address issues currently plaguing our nation from civil unrest to systemic oppression to the societal ripple effects of COVID-19. In order for us to heal as a society, we have to expose the wounds that have historically been overlooked. With "WILD" specifically - which I view as a tough work centered around healing - we wanted to continue to uplift diversified voices while breaking down the ivory silos and pillars so that we not only have a seat at the table and our work on the table, but to ensure that the voices of the voiceless are heard and amplified.”

“We are thrilled to partner with the Schomburg to present this work. WILD marks not only the launch of our new LIVE @651ARTS Series, but it will also be the first live in-person performance for 651 ARTS since the beginning of the pandemic. To come back in this way with such a compelling piece from such a dynamic artist is truly a presenter’s dream collaboration,” said **Monica L. Williams**, 651’s Chief Curator and Director of Programs. “At the core of our mission and DNA is always the artist and true creatives such as Jeremy McQueen will always have a home at 651. As the newest addition to our 2022 season - **FOREWORD, FORWARD: A Bridge Season** – WILD is the embodiment of this period of transition and transformation for 651 as the organization prepares to move into its first-ever home later this year. I’m so excited to see the response to the piece!”

Tickets for WILD are free but reservations are required; For more information on WILD, please visit www.blackirisproject.org/wild

About The Black Iris Project

Founded in 2016 by choreographer Jeremy McQueen, The Black Iris (BIP) is a ballet collaborative and education vehicle which creates new, relevant classical and contemporary ballet works that celebrate diversity and Black history. Based in New York City, the project hosts a team of predominantly artists of color delivering cross-disciplinary and original works. Championing individuality, the collaborative harnesses the Black Community’s inherent creative spirit to encourage and inspire youth of color to pursue art. Movement, and music as an expressive outlet and a means for collective healing. Since its inception, The BIP has been awarded generous support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Ford Foundation, New Music USA, BET, Shea Moisture, CUNY Dance Initiative, and has been featured in New York Times, Elle Magazine, Village Voice, Out Magazine, amongst other publications. Recently, the film adaption of The BIP’s 2018 ballet A Mother’s Rite received a 2020 Emmy Award nomination from The New York Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and Pointe Magazine recognized our Houston, TX debut (Summer 2019) as one of the Standout Performance of 2019: Audience Favorite.

Jeremy McQueen’s Black Iris Project held its debut season in July, 2016 at New York Live Arts. Three original works rooted in Black history were featured, highlighting a cast of predominantly Black dancers from world-renowned ballet companies. Most recent, The BIP was personally invited by American Ballet Theatre Principal Dancer, Misty Copeland) to perform MADIBA, a new ballet tracing the journey of Nelson Mandela, at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as part of the Ballet Across America festival.

To date, BIP has brought together over a dozen artistic collaborators and 70 performers to create nine original works for over 20 performances around the country.

About Jeremy McQueen

Jeremy McQueen is an award-winning choreographer, dedicated to story-telling rooted in experience and social engagement. His work aims to create spaces of comfort, solace, and connection through reflection—a sharing of observations of what is going on around him.

Born and raised in San Diego, California, McQueen is a 2008 graduate of The Ailey School/ Fordham University, B.F.A. in dance program and has also trained in the schools of American Ballet Theatre, San Francisco Ballet, and Alonzo King's LINES Ballet.

McQueen is a 2020 Emmy® Award-nominated director/choreographer, a 2019 recipient of the Bronx Council of the Arts' BRIO (Bronx Recognizes Its Own) Award, a 2013 recipient of the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago's Choreographers of Color Award [Winning Works] and two-time finalist of the Capezio Award for Choreographic Excellence (2012 & 2013). McQueen was recently named a 2020/2021 recipient of the Soros Justice Fellowship from Open Society Foundations, and is the only choreographer to receive the fellowship since the fellowship's inception in 1997.

McQueen has performed in Broadway's *Wicked* and *The Color Purple*, the Radio City Christmas Spectacular, and numerous Metropolitan Opera productions. McQueen cites two influential instructors as a source for his work and creative energy. From Donald Robinson, McQueen learned his guiding principle of discipline, doing what you know you're supposed to do even when no one is there to make sure you do it. At a time when McQueen was struggling to make his way as a dancer, Kazuko Hirabayashi encouraged him to choreograph about it. It is in the craft of story-telling and making a way for yourself through discipline and focus that McQueen was led to start The Black Iris Project, a space for like-minded artists to reflect their experiences.

McQueen is the founding artistic director and choreographer of The Black Iris Project. Jeremy McQueen and his Black Iris Project have had featured articles and profiles in *The New York Times*, *New Yorker*, *Out Magazine*, *Elle Magazine*, *Washington Post*, *Ebony Magazine*, *The Root*, *Pointe Magazine*, *BroadwayWorld*, *AfroPunk*, *Huffington Post*, *A Plus*, *Dance Magazine*, *Talks at Google*, *NY1*, *San Diego Union Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, among other publications.

About the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Founded in 1925 and named a National Historic Landmark in 2017, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture is one of the world's leading cultural institutions devoted to the preservation, research, interpretation, and exhibition of materials focused on African American, African Diasporan, and African experiences. As a research division of The New York Public Library, the Schomburg Center features diverse programming and collections totaling over 11 million items that illuminate the richness of global black history, arts, and culture. Learn more at schomburgcenter.org.

About the New York Public Library

For over 125 years, The New York Public Library has been a free provider of education and information for the people of New York and beyond. With 92 locations—including research and branch libraries—throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, the Library offers free materials, computer access, classes, exhibitions, programming and more to everyone from toddlers to scholars, and has seen record numbers of attendance and circulation in recent years. The New York Public Library receives approximately 18 million visits through its doors annually and millions more around the globe who use its resources at www.nypl.org. To offer this wide array of free programming, The New York Public Library relies on both public and private funding. Learn more about how to support the Library at nypl.org/support.

About 651 ARTS

Founded in Brooklyn, NY in 1988, the mission of 651 ARTS is to deepen awareness of and appreciation of contemporary performing arts and culture of the African Diaspora, and to provide professional and creative opportunities for artists of African descent.

651's signature programs have featured pioneering black choreographers from around the world including Germaine Acogny, Nora Chipaumire, Carmen de Lavallade, Diane McIntyre, Bebe Miller, Abdel R. Salaam and Jawole Willo Jo Zollar. As part of its commitment to the furtherance of conversations and celebration of Diaspora music, the institution has presented dialogues and performances by Somi, Hugh Masekela, and Grammy-winning artist Betty Carter, to name a few. Theatrical and text-based works by Anna Deavere Smith, Sekou Sundiata, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Ntozake Shange, Okwui Okpokwasili and Maria Bauman are representative of the hundreds of artists and productions featuring solo creations, collaborations, emerging artists, and works-in-development all produced by 651's visionary leadership in the field of Black performance.

651 ARTS' programs are made possible by gifts from generous individuals and grants from Bay and Paul Foundations, The Baisley Powell Elebash Fund, The Black Seed, Con Edison, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Ford Foundation, The Harkness Foundation for Dance, Howard Gilman Foundation, Lambent Foundation, Mertz Gilmore Foundation, Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, New York Community Trust, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, Emma Sheaffer Charitable Trust, Wallace Foundation, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, including Majority Leader Keith Powers, the Office of the Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso, and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature.

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For more information, contact:

Nina Flowers

Nina@FlowersPRAgency.com