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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Let It Shine! A Visit with Fannie Lou Hamer

A Virtual Performance

JACKSON—New Stage Theatre will continue the *Solo Show Series* with a pre-recorded performance of *Let It Shine! A Visit with Fannie Lou Hamer* by Frank Kuhn, filmed at the theatre in February 2021 in front of a limited live audience. Featuring New Stage Education Director Sharon Miles, virtual performances will be available to stream from February 18 through March 7, 2021 with access for 48-hours. Ticket prices are \$25. Tickets to this virtual performance can be charged by phone by calling the theatre at (601) 948-3533 or ordered online at www.newstagetheatre.com. Ticket buyers will immediately receive a LINK to the virtual event at time of purchase and will be able to view the production for 48-hours once clicked. This production is sponsored by the Mississippi Humanities Council.

She came into this world 100 years ago and, without a doubt, left it a better place. This new play depicts the life of civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer as it recounts her path from sharecropper in Ruleville, Mississippi to civil rights activist for an entire nation. Through moving songs and stirring conversation, Sharon Miles channels Mrs. Hamer as she takes the audience through her inspiring journey.

In 1999, inspired by Hebert Randall's photographs of 1964's Freedom Summer activities in Hattiesburg, Frank Kuhn assembled quotes, news articles, SNCC files, letters to the editor, songs, and speeches into a documentary readers' theatre piece, called *Voices of Freedom Summer*, celebrating the people and events of that summer. Sharon Miles was a member of that ensemble, and to her fell Mrs. Hamer's incisive lines. For both Sharon and Frank this was their first introduction to that iconic sharecropper/activist, and they were both thoroughly engaged by the woman. In 2015, missing Sharon's characterization, Frank offered to create a solo performance piece featuring Sharon as Fannie Lou Hamer, and Sharon jumped at the opportunity. That was followed by two years of intensive research, drafts and redrafts, and rehearsals in Mississippi and New York, as they searched for the woman behind the icon. *Let It Shine: A Visit with Fannie Lou Hamer* was first presented on October 16, 2017 at New Stage Theatre in a stage reading for The Mississippi Play Series as part of the Eudora Welty New Plays Series. The production premiered in March, 2018 for a three performance run in the theatre's Hewes Room Theatre.

"I was introduced to Mrs. Hamer before I had recognized the power of my own voice and before I had fully grasped the unspoken scars that you carry just growing up black in Mississippi," said Sharon Miles. "I recognized apart of myself in her. I saw members from my family, my church and my community in her. Fannie Lou Hamer's story challenged me, her faith inspired me, and her voice

empowered me to embrace all sides of my identity. She helped me fall deeper in love with history and question who's controlling the narrative.”

New Stage Artistic Director Francine Thomas Reynolds said: “I am so pleased that our next production in the New Stage Theatre Solo Series is *Let It Shine: A Visit with Fannie Lou Hamer*. The show received excellent audience reviews when it was first produced, in 2017, as a stage reading in New Stage Theatre’s Mississippi Plays Series and when that was followed, in 2018, with a workshop production in The Hewes Room Theatre. Producing the show on New Stage Theatre’s mainstage is a natural progression for the development of this new play with music. Its subject matter continues this season’s focus on Mississippi themed work that began last fall with the Thursday Nights Virtual Play Readings and Conversation and Mainstage 2020 Solo Show Series.”

“Although we are anxious to return to performing for live audiences, the challenges of producing the 2020-2021 Season offers the prospect to explore what makes New Stage unique among other professional regional theatres,” continues Reynolds. “We know our state’s rich literary history helps to create natural story tellers. We believe no one tells Mississippi stories better on the stage than Mississippians. *Let It Shine* upholds that belief. I welcome this opportunity to provide our representation of Mississippi stories to audiences local, and afar, through the new technology of theatrical streaming performances.”

Come to New Stage virtually and have the opportunity to be entertained with this dynamic theatrical presentation February 18-March 7, 2021. Ticket prices are \$25. Tickets to this virtual performance can be charged by phone by calling the theatre at (601) 948-3533 or ordered online at www.newstagetheatre.com.

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