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New Stage Theatre Receives National Endowment for the Arts Grant to Support the World Premiere of *Slippin' Through the Cracks: The Bobby Rush Musical*

October 20 – November 1, 2026 | New Stage Theatre | Jackson, Mississippi

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Jackson, MS — New Stage Theatre is pleased to announce that it is the recipient of an FY 2026 Grants for Arts Projects award of \$49,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The grant will support the world premiere production of *Slippin' Through the Cracks: The Bobby Rush Musical*, a new musical play with a score by Grammy Award-winning blues legend Bobby Rush and a book by Rush and Stephen Lloyd Helper.

The NEA award is part of the agency's FY 2026 Grants for Arts Projects program and recognizes the importance of artistic work that gives audiences opportunities to experience and participate in the arts while connecting with American history, culture, and community.

"The National Endowment for the Arts is proud to support opportunities across the country for Americans to experience and participate in the arts while celebrating our nation's history," said Mary Anne Carter, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. "As we approach our country's 250th anniversary, this is a moment to recognize the important role the arts continue to play in our lives, communities, and heritage."

About the Production

Slippin' Through the Cracks: The Bobby Rush Musical tells the extraordinary blues journey of Bobby Rush—from a sharecropper boy who found his way into the juke joints of the South, through the segregated blues scene of Chicago alongside artists including Muddy Waters and B.B. King, to an international career on the world stage. Blending live music and storytelling, the production traces Rush's life through the history of American blues and is grounded in a message of perseverance, resilience, and joy.

Artistic Director Quote

"Slippin' Through the Cracks is exactly the kind of project New Stage Theatre is proud to champion: a new work rooted in Mississippi, shaped by an extraordinary American voice, and created to bring history, music, and storytelling together onstage. Bobby Rush's life is remarkable not simply because of what he has accomplished, but because of what his journey represents—the determination to keep creating, keep moving forward, and keep finding a way through. To have the opportunity to develop and present this story as a world premiere, with the

support of the National Endowment for the Arts, is a tremendous honor for New Stage and for our community,” said Francine Thomas Reynolds, Artistic Director, New Stage Theatre

For New Stage Theatre, the award also represents an important investment in the role of a professional regional theatre as a place where new American stories can be developed, artists can collaborate, and audiences can encounter work that may go on to reach communities far beyond Mississippi. The theatre’s work with the creators of ***Slippin’ Through the Cracks*** began in 2021, making this world premiere the culmination of a multi-year creative relationship and an example of New Stage’s ongoing commitment to developing challenging new work.

The NEA’s investment in this world premiere is especially meaningful because the story being brought to the stage is deeply connected to Mississippi and to the broader American musical tradition. Bobby Rush’s journey—from the South to Chicago and ultimately to stages around the world—offers audiences an opportunity to experience the blues not simply as a musical form, but as a living record of American history, perseverance, creativity, and community. Presenting this story in Jackson allows New Stage to celebrate a Mississippi-born artistic legacy while giving audiences in the state an opportunity to experience a new work at the place where it is first brought to life for the public.

New Stage Theatre and the Development of the Musical

New Stage Theatre has been working with the creators of ***Slippin’ Through the Cracks*** since 2021. The theatre is honored to bring the world premiere to Jackson as part of its commitment to developing challenging new works and connecting audiences with stories that illuminate the human experience.

The production runs October 20 through November 1, 2026, at New Stage Theatre’s Jane Reid-Petty Theatre Center, 1100 Carlisle Street, Jackson, Mississippi. Tickets and additional production information are available at www.NewStageTheatre.com and www.SlippinThroughTheCracks.com.

About New Stage Theatre

New Stage Theatre’s mission is to provide professional theatre of the highest quality for the people of Mississippi and the Southeast. New Stage is committed to producing important contemporary works and classics selected for their artistic merit and their power to illuminate the human condition. Challenging new works in development are included through the Eudora Welty New Play Series and the Mississippi Plays Series.

Mississippi’s only year-round professional theatre, New Stage Theatre has provided professional theatre and arts education to Mississippians for more than sixty years. New Stage was chartered as a nonprofit organization in 1965 and produced its first season in 1966.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

Established by Congress, the National Endowment for the Arts is an independent federal agency and the largest funder of the arts and arts education in communities nationwide and a catalyst of public and private support for the arts. By advancing opportunities for arts participation and practice, the NEA fosters and sustains an environment in which the arts benefit everyone in the United States. To learn more, visit arts.gov.

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