CONTACT: Denise Schneider and Ata Younan **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

312.443.5151 or Press@GoodmanTheatre.org **January 25, 2023**

**BATTER UP! LYDIA R. DIAMOND’S ORIGINAL PLAY *TONI STONE* TAKES THE STAGE THIS WEEKEND,**

**STARRING TRACEY N. BONNER AS THE FIRST FEMALE PRO BASEBALL PLAYER – JANUARY 28 - FEBRUARY 26**

**\*\*RON OJ PARSON’S CHICAGO PREMIERE PRODUCTION FEATURES MOVEMENT BY CRISTIN CAROLE, A BASEBALL STADIUM SET BY TODD ROSENTHAL, COSTUMES BY MARA BLUMENFELD AND ORIGINAL MUSIC BY ANDRE PLUESS\*\***

**\*\*\*PHOTOS OF REHEARSAL ARE NOW AVAILABLE IN THE** [**PRESS ROOM**](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/z6754a96y14opx7/AACdjOW_T_o6NnTlmW-3vZQaa?dl=0)**\*\*\***

(Chicago, IL) The Chicago premiere of **Lydia R. Diamond**’s home-run hit *Toni Stone*, about the first woman to play professional baseball and overcome the racist and sexist challenges she faces on and off the field, takes the stage this weekend at the Goodman. In the title role is **Tracey N. Bonner**—herself a collegiate All-American softball player—directed by **Ron OJ Parson**. Movement Consultant **Cristin Carole** gets the nine-member company into shape against the backdrop of the action—a baseball stadium set designed by Tony Award-winning set designer **Todd Rosenthal** with projection design by **Mike Tutaj**. The creative team also includes **Henri Watkins** (Associate Director), **Sotirios Livaditis** (Associate Set Design), **Mara Blumenfeld** (Costume Design), **Keith Parham** (Lighting Design) and **Andre Pluess** (Original Music and Sound Design). *Toni Stone* starts this Saturday, January 28, and continues through February 26, 2023 in the 856-seat Albert Theatre; opening night is Monday, February 6. Tickets ($25 –$80, subject to change) are available at GoodmanTheatre.org/Toni or by phone at 312-443-3800. The Goodman is grateful for the support of Bank of America (Corporate Sponsor Partner), Snap-on (Technical Sponsor) and The Elizabeth Morse Charitable Trust (Lead Funder of IDEAA Programming).

“Toni Stone was a fighter,” said **Tracey N. Bonner**, who makes her Goodman debut in the title role. “People would tell her ‘no,’ and she would do it ten times better. She’s an amazing Black female baseball player dealing with being the only woman in a lot of spaces. Her story is important now, was important yesterday, and will be important tomorrow.”

Acclaimed Chicago director **Ron OJ Parson** directs Bonner and the nine-member cast, which also includes **Kai Ealy** (King Tut), **Joseph Aaron Johnson** (Elzie), **Chiké Johnson** (Alberga), **Travis Knight** (Stretch), **Victor Musoni** (Jimmy), **Jon Hudson Odom** (Millie), **Edgar Miguel Sanchez** (Spec) and **Terence Sims** (Woody). Understudies for this production include **Jabari Khaliq** (Jimmy/Stretch), **Krystel McNeil** (Toni Stone), **Matty Robinson** (Spec/Elzie), **Reginald Robinson** (Woody/King Tut/Millie) and **A.C. Smith** (Alberga). Casting is by **Lauren Port**, CSA and **Rachael Jimenez**, CSA. **Nikki Blue** is the Production Stage Manager and **Veronica Buztoz** is the Stage Manager.

“When I talk about Toni Stone I say, ‘Toni Stone was the first woman to play professional baseball, and she played in the Negro leagues.’ It’s an important distinction for me for two reasons. First, the Negro leagues were professional baseball, and I think people need that reminder—and Toni was the first woman to play with those men. Ever. How amazing,” said playwright **Lydia R. Diamond**, who played baseball in grade school and junior high. “After reading Martha Ackmann’s *Curveball, The Remarkable Story of Toni Stone*, I felt an obligation to tell Toni’s story.”

In *Toni Stone,* it’s the mid-twentieth century and, while Toni is an encyclopedia of baseball stats and has a great arm, she still can't play with the boys. Rejected by the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League because of her race, Toni sets out to become the first woman to play in baseball’s Negro Leagues.

“Negro League players were not just sportsmen, they were also entertainers, so I am thinking about what their ideas of performance would have been,” said Movement Consultant **Cristin Carole**. “I have been thinking about African diasporic dance forms in show business back in the day, I’ve been looking at hamboning, I've been looking at Satchel Paige’s magic ball trick, and more.”

**Lydia R. Diamond** is an award-winning playwright whose works include *The Gift Horse* (2002 premier at Goodman Theatre); *Toni Stone*; *Smart People;* *Stick Fly* (Broadway run at Cort Theatre); *Voyeurs de Venus;* *Harriet Jacobs;* *The Bluest Eye; The Inside*and *Stage Black*.  Her work has been performed at companies including American Conservatory Theatre Company, The Huntington Theatre, Congo Square, Steppenwolf Theatre Co., The Alliance Theatre, Arena Stage, Company One, Writers Theatre, McCarter Theatre Center, New Victory at the Duke (off-Broadway), The Guthrie Theater, Roundabout Theatre Co. (off-Broadway), Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Second Stage Theater (off-Broadway), Hartford Stage, Long Wharf Theatre, True Colors, MPAACT, Arden Theatre Co., Encores at City Center (New York), Intiman Theatre and PlayMakers Repertory Company. Diamond has been a W. E. B. DuBois Institute Non-Resident Fellow at Harvard, a Sundance Playwright Lab Creative Advisor, a Radcliffe Institute Fellow, a Sally B. Goodman Fellow and a National Endowment for the Arts/TCG playwright in residence. Awards include Horton Foote Playwriting Award, Joseph Jefferson Award, IRNE Award Nomination, Elliot Norton Award Nomination, Audelco Nomination, Kilroy’s List, Susan Smith Blackburn Prize Finalist, LA Critics Circle Award and National Art’s Club Kesselring Prize for Playwriting.  She was a consulting producer and writer for Showtime’s fourth season of *The Affair*and nominated for a Writer's Guild Award for Best Drama Episode.  She has also written for NBC, HBO, HBOMAX and Hulu. Diamond has an Honorary MFA from A.C.T., and an Honorary Doctorate from Pine Manor College.  She sits on the Dramatists Guild Legal Defense Fund Board and The Dramatist Guild Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access Committee. Diamond is an associate professor of Playwriting at University of Illinois at Chicago.

**Ron OJ Parson** (*Director*) returns to the Goodman, where he directed *Relentless* and *Sweat,* and acted in *Romance*. He is a native of Buffalo, New York and a graduate of the University of Michigan’s professional theater program. He is the co-founder and former Artistic Director of Onyx Theatre Ensemble of Chicago and a co-founder and co-director of Ripe ManGo Productions. Parson is a Resident Artist at Court Theatre and an Associate Artist with Teatro Vista, and an Associate Artist at Writers Theatre. Since moving to Chicago from New York in 1994, he has worked as both an actor and director. His Chicago credits include work with The Chicago Theatre Company, Victory Gardens, Goodman, Steppenwolf, Chicago Dramatists, Northlight, Court, Black Ensemble Theatre, Congo Square, Northlight Theatre, Urban Theatre Company, City Lit Theater, ETA Creative Arts, and Writers. Regionally, Parson has directed shows at Studio Arena Theatre, Alliance Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Milwaukee Repertory, South Coast Repertory, Pasadena Playhouse, Geva Theatre, Virginia Stage, Wilshire Theatre, The Mechanic Theatre, CenterStage, St. Louis Black Repertory, Pittsburgh Public Theater, Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre, Signature Theatre (New York), Kansas City Rep, Portland Stage, Indiana Repertory Theatre, American Players Theatre, and Ensemble Theatre of Cincinnati, among others. In Canada, he directed the world premiere of Palmer Park by Joanna McClelland Glass at the Stratford Festival. He is a member of AEA, SAG-AFTRA, and SDC. For further information, visit [ronojparson.com](http://www.ronojparson.com/)

**THE COMPANY OF *Toni Stone* (in alphabetical order)**

***For images, bios and additional information about the artists, visit the*** [***Play Detail Page***](https://www.goodmantheatre.org/toni)***.***

Toni Stone…………….Tracey N. Bonner
King Tut………………..Kai Ealy
Elzie…………………Joseph Aaron Johnson

Alberga…………………Chiké Johnson

Stretch………………..Travis Knight

Jimmy…………………Victor Musoni

Millie…………………Jon Hudson Odom

Spec…………………..Edgar Miguel Sanchez

Woody………………Terence Sims

Understudies for this production include Jabari Khaliq (Jimmy/Stretch), Krystel McNeil (Toni Stone), Matty Robinson (Spec/Elzie), Reginald Robinson (Woody/King Tut/Millie) and A.C. Smith (Alberga).

Associate Direction by Henri Watkins

Set Design by Todd Rosenthal

Associate Set Design by Sotirios Livaditis

Costume Design by Mara Blumenfeld

Lighting Design by Keith Parham

Original Music and Sound Design by Andre Pluess

Movement by Cristin Carole

Projection Design by Mike Tutaj

Casting is by Lauren Port, CSA and Rachael Jimenez, CSA. Nikki Blue is the Production Stage Manager and Veronica Buztoz is the Stage Manager. Devin Christor is the the Assistant to the Director and Playwright.

**ENHANCED AND ACCESSIBLE PERFORMANCES**

*Visit Goodman theatre.org/Access for more information about Goodman Theatre’s accessibility efforts.*

ASL-Interpreted: Friday, February 24 at 8pm – An American Sign Language interpreter signs the action/text as played.

Touch Tour and Audio-Described Performance: Saturday, February 25, 12:30pm Touch Tour; 2pm performance – The action/text is audibly enhanced for patrons via headset. *NOTE: Touch Tours for the 2022/2023 Season will not have access to the stage due to current health and safety protocols, but will feature alternate pre-show sensory introductions.*

Spanish Subtitles: Saturday February 25 at 8pm.

Open-Captioned: Sunday, February 26 at 2pm – An LED sign presents dialogue in sync with the performance.

**ABOUT GOODMAN THEATRE**

Chicago’s theater since 1925, **Goodman Theatre** is a not-for-profit arts and community organization in the heart of the Loop, distinguished by the excellence and scope of its artistic programming and community engagement. The theater’s artistic priorities include new play development (more than 150 world or American premieres), large scale musical theater works and reimagined classics. Artists and productions have earner two Pulitzer Prizes, 22 Tony Awards and more than 160 Jeff Awards, among other accolades. The Goodman is the first theater in the world to produce all 10 plays in August Wilson’s “American Century Cycle.” Its longtime annual holiday tradition *A Christmas Carol*, now in its fifth decade, has created a new generation of theatergoers in Chicago. The Goodman also frequently serves as a production and program partner with national and international companies and Chicago’s Off-Loop theaters.

Using the tools of the theatrical profession, the Goodman’s Education and Engagement programs aim to develop generations of citizens who understand the cultures and stories of diverse voices. The Goodman’s Alice Rapoport Center for Education and Engagement is the home of these programs, which are offered free of charge for Chicago youth—85% of whom come from underserved communities—schools and life-long learners.

Goodman Theatre was founded by William O. Goodman and his family in honor of their son Kenneth, an important figure in Chicago’s cultural renaissance in the early 1900s. The Goodman family’s legacy lives on through the continued work and dedication of Kenneth’s family, including Albert Ivar Goodman, who with his late mother, Edith-Marie Appleton, contributed the necessary funds for the creation on the new Goodman center in 2000.

Today, Goodman Theatre is led by Artistic Director **Susan Booth** and Executive Director/CEO **Roche Schulfer**. Theater leadership also includes the distinguished members of the Artistic Collective: **Rebecca Gilman**, **Dael Orlandersmith**, **Henry Godinez**, **Steve Scott**, **Kimberly Senior**, **Chuck Smith** and **Mary Zimmerman**. **Jeff Hesse** is Chairman of Goodman Theatre’s Board of Trustees, **Fran Del Boca** is Women’s Board President and **Craig McCaw** is President of the Scenemakers Board for young professionals.

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