

**THE PUBLIC THEATER  
ANNOUNCES  
STEW AND HEIDI RODEWALD  
JOIN ON-STAGE BAND FOR  
WORLD PREMIERE MUSICAL  
*THE TOTAL BENT***

**Text by Stew**

**Music by Stew and Heidi Rodewald**

**Directed by Joanna Settle**

**Complete Casting Announced**

**Performances Begin Tuesday, May 10**  
**With First Performance “Free For All”**

April 11, 2016 – The Public Theater (Artistic Director, Oskar Eustis; Executive Director, Patrick Willingham) announced today that **Stew** and **Heidi Rodewald** will perform live with the on-stage band for ***THE TOTAL BENT***, playing the guitar and bass, respectively. With text by **Stew** and music by **Stew** and **Heidi Rodewald**, the team behind the Tony Award-winning musical *Passing Strange*, which premiered at The Public in 2003, this world premiere musical is directed by **Joanna Settle**. Performances begin Tuesday, May 10 and continue through Sunday, June 12, with an official press opening on Wednesday, May 25.

The complete cast of ***THE TOTAL BENT*** features **Marty Beller** (*Drums, Musical Direction*); **Ato Blankson-Wood** (*Marty Roy*); **John Blevins** (*Trumpet*); **Kenny Brawner** (*Deacon Charlie*); **David Cale** (*Byron Blackwell*); **Vondie Curtis-Hall** (*Joe Roy*); **Damian Lemar Hudson** (*Deacon Dennis*); **Jahi Kears** (*Andrew*); **Brad Mulholland** (*Saxophone*); **Heidi Rodewald** (*Bass*); **Stew** (*Guitar*); and **Curtis Wiley** (*Abee*).

Public Theater Member tickets, and single tickets starting at \$65, are available now and can be accessed by calling **(212) 967-7555**, [www.publictheater.org](http://www.publictheater.org), or in person at the Taub Box Office at The Public Theater at 425 Lafayette Street. The Library at The Public is open nightly for food and drinks, beginning at 5:00 p.m., and Joe’s Pub at The Public continues to offer some of the best music in the city.

Continuing The Public’s mission to make great theater accessible to all, The Public’s **First Performance “Free for All”** returns; in partnership with **TodayTix**, New York’s premiere theater ticket app, free tickets to the first preview on Tuesday, May 10 will be available beginning May 3, via **TodayTix** mobile lottery.

Stew and Heidi Rodewald, creators of the Tony Award-winning show *Passing Strange*, team with director Joanna Settle to bring you their thrilling new musical, ***THE TOTAL BENT***, a riotous new show at the crossroads of the sacred and profane, survival and liberation, gospel and rock ‘n’ roll. When a British record producer arrives in Montgomery, Alabama to hook Marty Roy, a young black musical prodigy, he launches us back into Marty’s tumultuous upbringing. The son of a gospel star and self-proclaimed healer,

Marty spent his childhood writing the songs that have made his charismatic father famous. But in a nation on the verge of social upheaval, with the rising heat from the street guiding his pen, Marty finds himself at odds with his spiritually forceful father as he strives to create a masterpiece that will change America—no matter the cost. A funny, fiery, one-of-a-kind show, **THE TOTAL BENT** is about the passions that divide a father and son as they make their music and make their choice between salvation and selling out.

**THE TOTAL BENT** features scenic design by Andrew Lieberman, costume design by Gabriel Berry, lighting design by Thom Weaver, sound design by Obadiah Eaves and Sten Severson, and choreography by David Neumann.

**STEW** (*Book and Music*)'s credits include the book, lyrics, and co-composer of *Passing Strange* (2008 Tony: Best Book, 2-time 2007 Obie: Best New Theater Piece and Best Ensemble). In 2015, *Notes of a Native Song* in the spring at Harlem Stage and in the fall at Curran Theater; *Wagner/Max/Wagner* in the fall at the Kennedy Center; in 2014 *Family Album* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival; in 2013 *Chicago Omnibus*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art; in 2012 *California Analog* at UCLA's Royce Hall; in 2011 *Aong Factory* at the University of Wisconsin in Madison; in 2010 *Making It* in the spring at St. Anne's Warehouse; *Brooklyn Omnibus* in the fall at Brooklyn Academy of Music; and in 2009 Spike Lee's *Passing Strange*. Albums by The Negro Problem include *Post Minstrel Syndrome*; *Joys & Concerns* and *Guest Host*; *The Naked Dutch Painter*, both called Album of the Year by Entertainment Weekly; *Welcome Back*; *Something Deeper than These Changes*; *Making It*; and the *Passing Strange* cast album. For television, Stew is co-composer with Heidi Rodewald of "Gary Come Home," for *SpongeBob SquarePants*. Stew is a Sundance Institute Alum.

**HEIDI RODEWALD** (*Music*) is the Tony Award nominated, Obie Award-winning co-composer of the musical *Passing Strange*, which transferred from The Public Theater to Broadway in 2008. Rodewald composed music for Karen Kandel's *Portraits: Night and Day* (2004); *Brides of the Moon* by The Five Lesbian Brothers (2010); and co-composed music for Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing and Romeo and Juliet* (2010-12). Rodewald joined the band The Negro Problem in 1997, where she began a longtime collaboration with singer/songwriter, Stew. She has collaborated with him in a range of capacities – as a co-composer, producer/arranger and performer. She is the co-composer with Stew of the musical *Family Album* which premiered at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival during the 2014 season; *Notes of a Native Song*, commissioned by Harlem Stage in 2015; and *Wagner, Max! Wagner!!* which opened at the Kennedy Center in 2015. Rodewald is the composer of *The Good Swimmer*, with librettist Donna DiNovelli, presented by Prototype Festival January 2016 at the space HERE in NYC, and scored her first film *I Dream Too Much*, which had its world premiere at the 2015 SXSW Film Festival.

**JOANNA SETTLE** (*Director*) previously directed the Public Lab production of *The Total Bent*, as well as Miller's *In Darfur*, the finale of Suzan-Lori Parks *365 Days/365 Plays*, and Stephen Brown's *Future Me* at The Public. She also recently directed the world premiere of *HandsUp* by new Black Fest (Flashpoint Theater); *Rapture Blister Burn* by Gina Gionfreddo; *An Octoroon* by Brandon Jacob Jenkins (Wilma Theater); and Jamie Leonhart's *ESTUARY* (Joe's Pub/Kimmel Center). Her other credits include *Family Album* by Stew and Heidi Rodewald (Oregon Shakespeare Festival); *Harry Clarke* by David Cale (Warhol Museum); *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Shakespeare on the Sound). She directed the premiere of Heather Raffo's *Nine Parts of Desire* for Manhattan Ensemble Theater and restaged the production for The Geffen Playhouse, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art, MassMOCA, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and Arena Stage; directed and/or adapted 15 of Chicago's Division 13 Productions 17 projects, including *BLOOD LINE: The Oedipus/Antigone Story*, two plays by *Sophocles*, *Macbeth* by Ionesco, and several Samuel Beckett shorts including *Cascando* and *Play*. Her other credits include Artistic Director, Shakespeare on the Sound (2009-2012); Artistic Director, Division 13 (1998-2004). Director of the Ira Brind School of Theater Arts, The University of the Arts, Philadelphia. She holds a BA, Hampshire College; Graduate of the inaugural Julliard School Graduate Directing Program.

**MARTY BELLER** (*Drums, Music Direction*) is a drummer for They Might Be Giants since 2004. He is the 2009 Grammy Award winner for his work on “Here Come the 123s” by TMBG. His additional drum credits include Steve Earle, Jonathan Coulton, Mike Doughty, and Ivy. His composing credits include “Gracepoint” (Fox), “In Treatment” (HBO), “The Last Patrol” (HBO), “The Cruise” (Artisan), “Korengal,” “Emptying the Skies” (Music Box), *Another Gay Movie* (TLA), “Biography of Groucho Marks” (A&E), “iRead” (Scholastic). He is the 2013 Bessie award nominee for “A Single Ride” (Ephrat Asherie Dance). Beller has been performing and recording with Stew and Heidi since 2000.

**ATO BLANKSON-WOOD** (*Marty Roy*) was seen at The Public in *HAIR*, as well as in the Broadway and West End productions. He was most recently seen in The Foundry Theater’s production of *O, Earth*. His additional credits include *Iphigenia in Aulis* at Classic Stage Company; and *Lysistrata Jones* Off and on Broadway. His film credits include *It’s Kind of a Funny Story*, and he is a member of the Actor’s Center.

**JOHN BLEVINS** (*Trumpet*), is a trumpeter, guitarist, and composer who has performed and/or recorded with Theatre for a New Audience’s *Pericles*; Prospect Theater Company’s *The Underclassman* and *Iron Curtain*; Festival of New Trumpet Music; Wing Walker Orchestra; Noah & the MegaFauna; Morningsiders; iconiQ: The Soundtrack Orchestra; Trumpet City; Leave a Lasting Mark; and Actionplay among others. A graduate of Indiana University and New York University, John’s latest original project, MATTERHORN, was released on pfMENTUM records in 2015.

**KENNY BRAWNER** (*Deacon Charlie*) is the keyboardist, composer, and lead singer for the Brawler brothers Band. His theater credits include *The Total Bent* at The Public; *The City Club* at Minetta Lane Theater; *Clementine In The Lower Nine* at TheatreWorks; *What Makes A Man/Charles Aznavour* at Canadian Stage; and *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*. He has also appeared in the movie *Hair* and has done vocal and instrumental accompaniment for Alvin Ailey Dance Theater’s *Blues Suite* and *Revelations*, and his own production of *Ray Chares on My Mind*, a theater/concert piece.

**DAVID CALE** (*Byron Blackwell*) is the writer and performer of solo works including *A Likely Story* (The New Group); *Lillian* (Playwrights Horizons, Obie Award); *Deep in a Dream of You* (The Public Theater, Bessie Award). He wrote the book, lyrics, co-composed the music for and performed in *Floyd and Clea Under the Western Sky* (Playwrights Horizons, OCC nomination). He composed the songs for 600 HIGHWAYMEN’s *Employee of the Year* (2016 UTR, Public Theater). His film and television credits include *The Slaughter Rule* and “The Good Wife.”

**VONDIE CURTIS-HALL** (*Joe Roy*) is an actor, director, and screenwriter who has worked in film and television on both sides of the camera. His Broadway credits include *It’s So Nice To Be Civilized*; *Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music*; and *Dreamgirls*. As an actor, his film credits include *Coming to America*; *Mystery Train*; *Die Hard 2*; *Passion Fish*, *Falling Down*; *Crooklyn*; *Clear and Present Danger*; *Broken Arrow*; *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*; *Don King: Only in America*; telefilm *Ali: An American Hero*; *Eve’s Bayou*; *Honeydripper*; *Talk To Me*; *Black Nativity*; *Streetwise*; *Bad Lieutenant*; *Cymbeline* (Venice Film Festival); *The Experimenter*; and *Breaking Brooklyn*. As a director, his film credits include *Abducted: The Carlina White Story*; *Waist Deep*; *Redemption: The Stan Tookie Williams Story*; and *Gridlock’d*. For television, he has helmed episodes of “Firefly,” “Gossip Girl,” “The Starter Wife,” “The Shield,” “Sleeper Cell,” “Boston Legal,” and “ER.” As an actor, the latter show earned him an Emmy Award nomination, for his portrayal of a troubled transgender who commits suicide. He has also guest-starred on “Soul Food” and “I’ll Fly Away”; and was a series regular on “Chicago Hope,” the new Marvel series “Daredevil,” and ABC’s “Spark.”

**DAMIAN LEMAR HUDSON** (*Deacon Dennis*) has previously been seen as “Paris” in the Shakespeare on the Sounds production of *Romeo & Juliet*. He received a musical theatre degree from the University of Arizona.

**JAH KEARSE** (*Andrew*) has appeared at The Public in *The Fortress of Solitude* and on Broadway in *Holler If Ya Hear Me!* and *Baby It’s You!* His other select credits include *Indian Joe*; Maurice Hines’ *Yo Alice*; *Hadestown*; *Ladykillers*; Debbie Allen’s *Souls Possessed*; *Passing Strange*; *Motherf\*\*ker with the*

*Hat; Topdog/Underdog; Cool Papa's Party' Gut Bucket Blues; Sty Of The Blind Pig; Two Trains Running.* He is also an alumni of The Freddie Hendricks' Youth Ensemble of Atlanta.

**BRAD MULHOLLAND** (*Saxophone*). As a versatile performer on all types of saxophones, flutes and clarinets, Mulholland contributes his sound to a broad range of musical projects. When he is not teaching or playing for theatre, he is playing swing, funk, modern jazz, and improvised music.

**CURTIS WILEY** (*Abee*)'s 2015 highlight include *Diner: The Musical* at Delaware Theater Co.; *Rothschild & Sons* at York Theatre Co.; *The Artist & The Scientist* at CAP21; and *Straight Faced Lies* at Fringe NYC. His other NYC credits include *Pageant: The Musical*; *The Great Society* at York Shakespeare Co.; *TUT* at NYMF; *King Lear* with Exit, Pursued by a Bear; *The Wild Party* at Columbia Stages; as well as *Jersey Boys*, *The Lion King*; and *Motown: The Musical*. He is also an alumni of the Sundance Theatre Institute's *Wig Out* by Tarell Alvin McCraney.

### **ABOUT THE PUBLIC THEATER:**

The Public Theater, under the leadership of Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, is the only theater in New York that produces Shakespeare, the classics, musicals, contemporary and experimental pieces in equal measure. Celebrating his 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary season at The Public, Eustis has created new community-based initiatives designed to engage audiences like Public Lab, Public Studio, Public Forum, Public Works, and a remount of the Mobile Unit. The Public continues the work of its visionary founder, Joe Papp, by acting as an advocate for the theater as an essential cultural force, and leading and framing dialogue on some of the most important issues of our day. Creating theater for one of the largest and most diverse audience bases in New York City for nearly 60 years, today the Company engages audiences in a variety of venues—including its landmark downtown home at Astor Place, which houses five theaters and Joe's Pub; the Delacorte Theater in Central Park, home to free Shakespeare in the Park; and the Mobile Unit, which tours Shakespearean productions for underserved audiences throughout New York City's five boroughs. The Public's wide range of programming includes free Shakespeare in the Park, the bedrock of the Company's dedication to making theater accessible to all; Public Works, an expanding initiative that is designed to cultivate new connections and new models of engagement with artists, audiences and the community each year; and audience and artist development initiatives that range from Emerging Writers Group and to the Public Forum series. The Public is located on property owned by the City of New York and receives annual support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs; and in October 2012 the landmark building downtown at Astor Place was revitalized to physically manifest the Company's core mission of sparking new dialogues and increasing accessibility for artists and audiences, by dramatically opening up the building to the street and community, and transforming the lobby into a public piazza for artists, students, and audiences. The Public is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning *Fun Home* and Lin-Manuel Miranda's acclaimed American musical *Hamilton*, and Danai Gurira's *Eclipsed* featuring Lupita Nyong'o. The Public has received 47 Tony Awards, 167 Obie Awards, 52 Drama Desk Awards, 48 Lortel Awards, 31 Outer Critics Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics Awards, and four Pulitzer Prizes. [www.publictheater.org](http://www.publictheater.org).

## TICKET INFORMATION

**TOTAL BENT** begins performances in the Anspacher Theater on Tuesday, May 10 and runs through Sunday, June 12, with an official press opening on Wednesday, May 25.

Public Theater Member tickets, and single tickets starting at \$65, can be accessed by calling **(212) 967-7555**, [www.publictheater.org](http://www.publictheater.org), or in person at the Taub Box Office at The Public Theater at Astor Place at 425 Lafayette Street.

Free tickets to the first preview on Tuesday, May 10 will be available via TodayTix mobile lottery. Winners will be notified by email and push notifications between 12:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. on the day of the first preview. Winners must confirm their winning tickets in the TodayTix app within one hour of being notified. A limited number of tickets will also be distributed, beginning at 12:00 p.m., via lottery in the lobby of The Public Theater at Astor Place at 425 Lafayette Street.

Subject to availability, \$20 rush tickets will be sold at the Taub Box Office at The Public. Rush begins at 6:00 p.m. for evening shows, and one hour prior to the first show of the day for matinees. The limit is two tickets per person, cash only. \$30 student tickets may be purchased in person in advance, subject to availability. Must have a valid student ID at the time of purchase; limit one ticket per person, cash only.

The performance schedule is Tuesday through Friday at 7:00 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday at 1:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. Between May 16 and May 19 the performance times are Tuesday Through Friday at 8:00 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. (*There is no 1:00 p.m. performance on Saturday, May 14; and no 7:00 p.m. performance on Sunday, June 5 and Sunday, June 10.*)

The Library at The Public is open nightly for food and drinks, beginning at 5:00 p.m., and Joe's Pub at The Public continues to offer some of the best music in the city. For more information, visit [www.publictheater.org](http://www.publictheater.org).

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