



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **651 ARTS Names Toya Lillard as Executive Director**

### **New Leadership Appointment and Promotion of Core Team Members Signifies Institution's Continued Institutional Expansion and Revitalization**

(Brooklyn, NY – August 9, 2022) - 651 ARTS - Brooklyn's premier organization for the African Diasporic performing arts - today named **Toya Lillard** as the renowned institution's Executive Director. Lillard, who initially joined 651 as Interim Executive Director in May of this year, was appointed in a more permanent capacity by the organization's Board of Trustees to a three-year term in the role.

Lillard, a seasoned arts and culture leader, will lead 651 ARTS through a comprehensive three-year strategic plan for capacity building and major expansion including the organization's planned move into the much-buzzed about cultural spaces at 10 Lafayette in Brooklyn slated for Spring, 2023. 651's new home will include its own **state-of-the-art black box theater, two rehearsal studios, and a media studio**, enabling the institution to provide artists with essential and flexible new modes of support - and to further foster artists and cultivate new audiences. Additionally, Lillard will oversee all other aspects of the institution's day-to-day operations including artistic vision, administrative and fiscal oversight, board development, fund development and partnerships, with the goal of working toward advancing a reimagined 651 ARTS as it ushers in a new chapter in the organization's evolution.

"We are overjoyed, and quite gratified with what Toya has accomplished in just three short months, in bringing her strong leadership skills and artistic vision to 651 ARTS," Board Chair, **Yvonne Joyner Levette**. "We are thrilled to invite her to continue to lead the organization in a more permanent capacity as we prepare to open and operate our first venue in our 34-year history."

With 25 years of arts management and leadership experience, Lillard brings to 651 a strong background as a theater artist, director, arts administrator, educator, and facilitator as well as an impressive track record of guiding cultural institutions through expansion and periods of growth.

"I am honored and humbled to lead 651 ARTS, an organization with deep roots in Brooklyn, known for fueling the arts ecosystems that have long existed in Black communities in Brooklyn, and beyond," said Lillard. "I am deeply indebted to the Board of Directors for putting their faith in me and to former 651 ARTS' Executive Director and visionary Shay Wafer, as I am a product of her mentorship, and am grateful to her for nurturing my leadership."

651 also announced promotions of key members of its executive team with the advancements of **Robert W. Henderson, Jr.** to Director of Production and Operations and **Farren Wood** to Manager of Programs and Community Engagement. Henderson, who has worked as Production Manager with 651 ARTS since 2005, will now be an active member of the leadership team, and responsible for all aspects of operation of 651's

presentation space, along with its productions, on and offsite. Joining the team in 2021 as Program Associate, Wood will now provide - in collaboration with Executive Director Toya Lillard - creative vision and leadership for 651 ARTS' artistic programming and community engagement activities including presentations, partnerships, educational programs, and artist residencies/commissions.

Since its founding in 1988, 651 ARTS has become a trusted convener of contemporary African Diasporic artistic expression, a champion and nurturer for emerging artists and their work and a vital cultural resource for its surrounding community. As it moves forward, part of 651 ARTS' mission is to preserve the legacy of Black culture in Brooklyn, celebrate the eclecticism of Black performance and to pioneer new visions of African Diaspora artists. This year – the transition year – is integral for the institution as it continues to lay the framework that will further help to reinforce 651 ARTS' role as a leader of African Diasporic culture while also establishing it an incubator for artistic innovation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **BIOS**

### **About Toya Lillard**

Toya Lillard is a theater artist, director, arts educator, and facilitator. Lillard currently serves as Executive Director of [651 ARTS](#), a nationally renowned arts presenting organization. Before joining 651 Arts, Lillard was Executive Director of [viBe Theater Experience](#), an arts education organization and theater company in Brooklyn, New York. Prior to her role at viBe, Lillard was Director of School Programs for The [New York Philharmonic's Education Department](#), where she helped develop its nationally recognized School Partnership Program and part-time faculty at [The New School](#), where she teaches [Collaborative Theatre Practice](#). She serves on the Board of the [New York City Arts in Education Roundtable](#), and co-chairs the TaskForce on Equity and Inclusion, and serves on the Board of viBe Theater Experience. Lillard holds a B.A. from Vassar College, and an M.A. from New York University's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. She currently resides in Brooklyn, NY.

### **About Robert W. Henderson, Jr.**

Robert W. Henderson, Jr., has been with 651 ARTS since 2005, managing a wide range of live performance events, including 651's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration at the BAM Harvey Theater with the Mississippi Delta Heritage Project, a 2-week celebration of the artistic culture of the Mississippi Delta. He has been the primary lighting designer for Tiffany & Co. Fifth Ave Flagship store since 2011 and the resident lighting designer for Theatre Three Productions in Port Jefferson, NY, since 2005. He has production managed ceremonies for Pratt Institute and NYU Steinhardt at Radio City Music Hall; Brooklyn Youth Chorus's *Silent Voices* workshop and premiere at BAM Opera House; *Season of Cambodia*, a month-long festival featuring 125 Cambodian artists throughout NYC; and *Thirsting for Peace*, commemorating 70 years of UNESCO at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, among many other events in NYC and internationally.

### **About Farren Wood**

Farren Wood is a South African/Australian arts manager, creative professional and fierce community advocate. An inherent and culturally inherited love of storytelling has seen her dedicate her career to either telling the story or cultivating a place and space for stories to be told. Farren has worked as an actor, writer, performer, producer, event and artist manager. She has created and produced events for multiple West-Australian arts organizations including Fringeworld Perth. Her most recent work includes events for the capital city local government, the City of Perth. These range from small community gatherings to large-scale commercial music festivals. Wood has a BA in Arts Management from the West Australian Academy of Performing Arts. She currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

## **About 651 ARTS**

Founded in Brooklyn, NY in 1988, the mission of 651 ARTS is to deepen awareness of and appreciation for 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 the Association of Performing Arts Professionals supported by The Mellon Foundation, 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, Mosaic Network & Fund, 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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