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Passing Strange – Spike Lee-Directed Film of Broadway Production –
Premieres on THIRTEEN'S **Great Performances** on PBS

2008 Rock Musical Won Tony For
“Best Book of a Musical”

(New York, NY – December 22, 2009) The show universally applauded for its originality, deep emotional resonance, and powerful, high-octane score, makes its broadcast debut on THIRTEEN'S **Great Performances** on PBS. **Passing Strange**, the Spike Lee-directed film featuring the award-winning Broadway rock musical of the same title, will air in primetime on Wednesday, January 13, 2010 at 9 p.m. EST (check local listings).

Great Performances is a production of THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG – one of America's most prolific and respected public media providers.

Passing Strange is the semi-autobiographical story of a young black man who leaves behind his middle-class, church-ruled upbringing in mid-1970s Los Angeles to travel to Europe in search of his artistic and personal identity, or what he calls “the real.” There he finds he can exploit a “South Central” persona, playing the cool, black expatriate-musician who speaks for his people. Picaresque misadventures with sex, drugs, politics and art find him in a far-out Amsterdam and a hyper-militant Berlin. But in the end, he discovers that cultural complexity—and hypocrisy—are not limited to middle-class African American

life, and that while to him art may be more real than life, only love is truly more than real. Co-starring with Stew as 'Narrator' is an extraordinarily talented ensemble cast, featuring DeAdre Aziza, Eisa Davis, Colman Domingo, Chad Goodridge, Rebecca Naomi Jones, and Daniel Breaker as the story's central character, 'Youth.'

The Broadway show won a 2008 Tony Award for "Best Book of a Musical," and in total, it received seven Tony nominations, including "Best Musical." The show also won a Drama Desk Award, a New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and two Obie Awards. The highly-acclaimed score does not stand apart from the action as in some rock musicals, but advances the narrative through a sophisticated libretto. Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times* raves: "Passing Strange is bursting at the seams with melodic songs, and it features a handful of theatrical performances to treasure. Call it a rock concert with a story to tell, trimmed with a lot of great jokes. Or call it a sprawling work of performance art, complete with angry rants and scary drag queens. Call it whatever you want, really. I'll just call it wonderful."

Passing Strange was originally created and workshopped at the Sundance Theatre Lab in Utah in 2004 by Stew, his long-time musical partner Heidi Rodewald, and Annie Dorsen, who collaborated on the creation of the show and directed it as well. It was performed at Berkeley Rep in California before coming to New York City's Public Theater in 2007. The production then moved to Broadway and opened to critical acclaim in February 2008 at the Belasco Theatre. Spike Lee, who had seen the show, was contacted by producer Steve Klein, who was interested in making a film of the stage production. "When I saw the play I was knocked out," says Lee. "The story, its musicianship and the acting was a revelation. Unlike recent translations of theater onto the big screen, the film doesn't alter any of the cast, staging or production. This is a hybrid."

Lee, working with cinematographer Matthew Libatique ("Miracle at St. Anna," "Iron Man," "Inside Man") shot two performances of the Broadway show before its close, including the final performance. Lee then filmed the production without the audience, enabling dynamic close-ups, dolly shots, crane shots and

other cinematic coverage. Lee's long-time editor, Barry Brown, edited the final film.

A 40 Acres & a Mule Filmworks and Apple Core Holdings production in association with Thirteen for WNET.ORG, ***Passing Strange*** was produced by Steve Klein, with Klein, Kenneth Greif, Laurence Horn, and William Kohane serving as executive producers.

Great Performances is funded by the Irene Diamond Fund, Vivian Milstein, LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, public television viewers and PBS. For ***Great Performances***, Bill O'Donnell is series producer and David Horn is executive producer. Visit **Great Performances Online** at www.pbs.org/gperf for additional information about this and other programs.

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