



## **BIG NEA AWARDS TO TWO RED BANK VENUES**



*Next-generation swing-music wildman Louis Prima Jr. and his Witnesses will perform at the Count Basie Theatre in spring 2016, as part of an enhanced Jazz at the Basie slate funded by an Art Works grant from the National Endowment of the Arts. Two River Theater also received an NEA grant, toward the development of a new musical. (Photo by Mitchell Glotzer)*

Two major nonprofit arts entities in Red Bank have been named as recipients of a National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) Art Works award for 2015. The Count Basie Theatre and Two River Theater were among 15 New Jersey-based organizations awarded a total of \$290,000 toward the development of original arts programming; part of a 51st annual slate of NEA grants totaling \$27.7 million and supporting more than 1,100 projects in 49 states, U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.

The NEA's Art Works category supports the creation of work and presentation of both new and existing work, lifelong learning in the arts, and public engagement with the arts through 13 arts disciplines or fields. Two River Theater Company was recipient of \$20,000 to support the development and funding of *The Ballad of Little Jo*,

an original musical featuring lyrics by Sarah Schlesinger and music by Mike Reid (*A Wind in the Willows Christmas*), as well as supplementary education programming (discussions, student matinees, classroom teachers' guides) that focuses on the women of Frontier America.

In celebrating its namesake, the Basie will use its \$15,000 NEA grant to help produce a series of programs and activities celebrating Jazz Appreciation Month, with jazz-related lectures, films and biopics scheduled to take place throughout April 2016. On May 19 the celebration will continue with a jazz-centric edition of the Count Basie Theatre's "No Shush!" kid's concert series, starring Louis Prima Jr and the Witnesses, as well as the Red Bank Jazz Orchestra under the direction of conductor Joe "Mooche" Muccioli, artistic director of the Jazz Arts Project at the Basie's Performing Arts Academy. Proceeds from that performance — and a donation from the Gia Maione Prima Foundation, named for Prima's late mother — will match the NEA gift.

"We are honored and delighted to be recognized by the NEA and to receive this grant," said Tom Widener, Chairman of the Count Basie Theatre's Board of Directors. "The grant will aid the Count Basie Theatre significantly in its mission to expand the scope of our programming and our commitment to the arts and education."

The Garden State's two United States Senators praised the NEA awards and its recipients, with Senator Bob Menendez commenting that "New Jersey is home to a plethora of talented people, as well as vibrant music and arts groups, and I'm glad these investments will allow New Jerseyans to express their creativity and share their artistic gifts with all of us."

"Supporting New Jersey's art community helps preserve our diverse culture and rich history while showcasing the Garden State's creative talent," added Senator Cory Booker. "As organizations across the country continue to face budget constraints, this federal investment will help New Jersey's thriving art community flourish and continue to capture imaginations for generations."

In the words of NEA Chairman Jane Chu, "The arts are part of our everyday lives – no matter who you are or where you live – they have the power to transform individuals, spark economic vibrancy in communities, and transcend the boundaries across diverse sectors of society."

Other New Jersey-based recipients of the 2015 Art Works awards include Montclair Art Museum (\$40,000 for its "Matisse and American Art" exhibit); the partnership of Rutgers University and the City of Camden (\$35,000); the Arts Council of Princeton (\$30,000); International Sculpture Center of Hamilton (\$20,000); Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, Millville (\$20,000); the Arts Council of the Morris Area (\$20,000 for a Morristown commission by sculptor Gabriele Hiltl-Cohen); the NJPAC of Newark (\$20,000 for the performance project "The World of Sarah Vaughan"); McCarter Theater, Princeton (\$20,000 toward development of the Sharyn Rothstein play *All the Days*); Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, Fort Lee (\$10,000 to support a festival celebrating the Chinese Lunar New Year); Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, Madison (\$10,000 to produce a free outdoor production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*); New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Newark (\$10,000 to support a festival of music inspired by Shakespeare); Princeton Symphony Orchestra (\$10,000 toward a 35th anniversary project), and the Theater Project of Union (\$10,000 to support the Regina Taylor play *Crowns*). Go [here](#) for additional details on projects included in the NEA grant announcement.