Stage Notes — ‘Crowns’ cast is set; Joffrey announces Choreographers of Color awards

by Hedy Weiss Theater Critic/hweiss@suntimes.com November 16, 2011 3:40PM

— “CROWNS” TAPS DIVAS: Two widely admired Chicago divas — E. Faye Butler, who earlier this week received the Sarah Siddons Society’s Leading Lady Award, and Felicia Fields (the Tony-nominated actress in “The Color Purple”) — will lead the Goodman Theatre cast of Regina Taylor’s music-infused show, “Crowns,” the story of black church women of the South and their hats. “Crowns” will run June 30- Aug. 5, 2012. Also part of the cast will be 21-year-old newcomer Jasondra Johnson of Calumet City who was selected in open auditions. For tickets, call (312) 443-3800 or visit www.GoodmanTheatre.org.

— JOFFREY NAMES CHOREOGRAPHERS OF COLOR: Carlos dos Santos Jr., Ray Mercer and Bennyroyce Royon have been selected to receive the Joffrey Ballet’s second annual Choreographers of Color awards, which are designed to tap the talents of promising young minority dancemakers. Each of the winners will receive a minimum of 30 hours of rehearsal time to set their new works on Joffrey Academy trainees, as well as $2,500 stipends. The three world premieres will be presented March 11, 2012 at 4 p.m. at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance, 205 E. Randolph.

Dos Santos, who has performed with major U.S. and Brazilian companies, will showcase a piece that focuses on contemporary pointe work and unusual use of the torso and arms. Mercer, currently in the Broadway cast of “The Lion King,” will present a work of speed and intricate partnering. And Royon, currently in his fourth season as a dancer with Karole Armitage’s troupe, Armitage Gone! Dance, will blend ballet with edgy modern dance. Also on the program will be “Le Roi s’Amuse: Dances in Ancient Style,” a piece by Alexei Kremnev, one of the Joffrey Academy’s artistic directors.

Tickets: $15 in advance; $18 at the door. Call (312) 334-7777 or visit www.harristheaterchicago.org.