

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**RISING STAR THUSO MBEDU TALKS TO *EMMY* ABOUT HOW HER EMOTIONAL ROLE IN AMAZON'S *THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD* PARALLELS HER REAL-LIFE JOURNEY**

(**NOHO ARTS DISTRICT**, Calif. — May 4, 2021) — Months after starring as Cora, a formerly enslaved runaway in Amazon's *The Underground Railroad*, Thuso Mbedu still thinks about her emotionally charged scenes and how the character parallels her own story. The rising star talks to *emmy* about her experience making Barry Jenkins' adaptation of Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel. The award-winning official publication of the Television Academy is on newsstands now.

Mbedu, who was born in South Africa at the end of Apartheid, was just four years old when her mother died of a brain tumor. The devastating loss changed the trajectory of her life as she moved to the small town of Pietermaritzburg to be raised by her grandmother. She discovered acting as a teen and knew she was destined for greater things. "I knew there was much more to life than what was currently presented to me," Mbedu says. "I applied to universities that were four, five hours away from home because I wanted to see a life beyond that." She studied theater and performing arts management at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, which she described as a "stepping stone to the rest of the world."

In the *emmy* cover story "**Trust and Triumph**," Mbedu reveals that all of these experiences informed her portrayal of Cora in *The Underground Railroad*, a poignant story about pre-Civil War America. She wasn't always confident she could handle the role. "I went through emotions of, 'I would really like to perform this character,'" she says. "'Not just for my career, but for my personal growth.' But I also had moments where I'd be like, 'I don't actually think that I am good enough to perform this type of story.'" But executive producer and showrunner Barry Jenkins knew otherwise. Mbedu recounts his encouraging words: "He would tell us, 'I trust you, so I need *you* to trust you. You're not here by mistake. You're here for a reason.'"

Despite Mbedu's fears, Jenkins knew she was the right actress for the role. "I had never seen or heard of this young woman," Jenkins says. "Her [audition] tape came through the system. I was like, 'I am sitting across from the woman. This is her.'" Mbedu rose to the occasion by listening to the testimonies of formerly enslaved people sent by Jenkins and perfecting Cora's vocals.

The 10-episode limited series will be available in full May 14 on Amazon Prime. Jenkins believes the series reflects our shared humanity. "I just felt such a deep connection to these folks," he says. "In order for you and me to have this

conversation, they must have believed the possibility of it. I think in that way, there's a direct line from us to them."

Additional feature highlights from the new issue include:

- Since 1997, generations of Americans have turned to Emmy-nominated PBS series *Antiques Roadshow* for appraisals of their valuable objects or family heirlooms. In "**The Most Revealing Road**," *emmy* reveals how producers planned for the program's 25th anniversary in the midst of a pandemic and what makes the show so relatable.
- In their quest to make the popular *Life Below Zero* franchise, the crew has had to endure frigid temperatures, roving bears and no showers for weeks. In "**Cold Open**," *emmy* takes you behind the scenes of Nat Geo's riveting shows shot off the grid in Alaska's vast wilderness.
- Katey Sagal has played some strong women in her storied career on television, and her recent role as the title character of ABC's new drama *Rebel* shares the same DNA. In "**Still She Persisted**," Sagal reveals what drew her to the role of Annie Bello (loosely based on the life of Erin Brockovich) and how she identifies with the character.

About *emmy*

Emmy, the official publication of the Television Academy, goes behind the scenes of the industry for a unique insider's view. It showcases the scope of television and profiles the people who make TV happen, from the stars of top shows to the pros behind the cameras, covering programming trends and advances in technology. Honored consistently for excellence, *emmy* is a six-time Maggie Award winner as Best Trade Publication in Communications or the Arts and has collected 52 Maggies from the Western Publishing Association. *Emmy* is published 12 times per year, and is available on selected newsstands and at TelevisionAcademy.com for single print and digital copies as well as subscriptions.

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