

NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE

For Immediate Release

January 23, 2007

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Blue *Everyone has a secret...* *Intriguing romance and sultry blues*

January, 23, 2007; St. Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, the nation's preeminent African American theatre, proudly announces the opening of *Blue* written by Charles Randolph-Wright, music by Nona Hendryx, and lyrics by Nona Hendryx and Charles Randolph-Wright on February 15, 2007. Lou Bellamy directs this lyrical comedy/drama with musical direction by Sanford Moore. The production will run February 15 through March 11, 2007.

Issues of class, wealth, and fame bubble to the surface in this play which is part comedy, part drama, and a whole lot of good music. The play chronicles Peggy Clark's social ambitions and her two sons struggle to reconcile their family's expectations with their own personal goals. Set in a small town in South Carolina, the Clark family is the wealthiest African America family in the city. They are the proprietors of the town's only African American funeral home. To the outside eye, Peggy Clark has it all—beauty, a well appointed home, an adoring husband, two healthy children and the respect of her community. But there is a private side to Peggy Clark harboring a passion few ever see. She keeps this part of herself well hidden until a sudden twist of fate exposes her secret and fracture's the Clark family's smooth veneer.

Director, Lou Bellamy says, "This play explores public persona versus private persona. It also depicts the way wealth and values are passed down from generation to generation and opens a discussion about whether or not those values are synonymous with integrity." While examining the intersections of class, wealth, and family, Penumbra's production of *Blue* celebrates contemporary milestones of growth, survival, and history within the African American community.

The star studded cast includes: Sandy Adell, Keith Bolden, Christiana Clark, Blaine Crawford, Shawn Hamilton, Namir Smallwood, Dennis Spears, and Austene Van.

*****MORE*****

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ARTISTS' BIOS:

SANDY ADELL (Tillie Clark) is pleased to make her Penumbra debut. A native of Detroit, she lives in Madison, Wisconsin, where she is a professor of literature in the Department of Afro-American Studies. In 1999 she fell in love with theater and has been pursuing acting ever since. She recently performed as Weedy in the Illinois Theatre Center's production of *The Sty of the Blind Pig*, and as Professor Willard in the Madison Repertory Theatre's production of *Our Town*.

KEITH BOLDEN (Samuel Clark Jr.) received his M.F.A. in Acting from the University of Illinois and a B.A. in Theatre Arts from California State University, Fresno. Acting credits include *A Raisin in the Sun* at Hartford Stage, *Owed to My First Love* at Premiere Stages, *Picking Up the Baby* in the New York International Fringe Festival, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in The Shakespeare Festival of St. Louis, *Civil War* for TheatreWorks/USA, and *Ragtime* at CentreStage in Pennsylvania. Film credits include *More Than a Woman* and *The Coldest Winter*.

CHRISTIANA CLARK (LaTonya) is originally from Chicago. She trained at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in Hollywood, California. She is the recipient of the Ameriprise Ivey Award for Emerging Artist of 2006. She has been recently onstage in the Twin Cities in *Lutefisk Champ & Other Frozen Holiday Tales* at the seen History Theatre, *Wait Until Dark* at Paul Bunyan Playhouse in Bemidji, Minnesota, and *Constant Star* at Park Square Theatre. This is her first production at Penumbra.

BLAINE CRAWFORD (Reuben Clark) began his acting career at age nine. His acting debut was in *Home on the Mornin' Train* with Youth Performance Company. Other acting credits include *Aladdin* with Stages Theater Company, *March to Freedom* with Youth Performance Company, and *The Jungle Book* at Blake School.

SHAWN HAMILTON (Samuel Clark) has been seen at Penumbra in *Stage Directions*, *Seven Guitars*, and *Black Nativity*. Other local theatres he has worked with include Mixed Blood, Guthrie Theater, Illusion Theater, Children's Theater, The Jungle, 15 Head, Pioneer Place, Ten Thousand Things, and Thirst. He has also worked regionally with Trinity Rep, Yale Rep, and Dallas Theatre Center. He can also be seen in *Lost Boys of the Sudan* with Children's Theatre Company.

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NAMIR SMALLWOOD (Rueben Clark/Adult) is a Newark, New Jersey native. He is pleased to be returning to the Penumbra stage after debuting as Jesus in *On the Open Road* three seasons ago. He is a recent graduate of the University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theatre BFA Actor Training Program. Namir has appeared on stage throughout the Twin Cities including the Playwrights' Center, Pillsbury Theatre, and the Children's Theatre Company.

DENNIS W. SPEARS (Blue Williams) has appeared on the Penumbra stage this season in *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *Black Nativity - A Homecoming*. Other acting credits include *Ain't Misbehavin'* at Actor's Theatre of Louisville, *Crowns* at The Guthrie Theatre and *Smokey Joe's Café* at Hey City Theatre. An accomplished jazz vocalist, Dennis made his splash in jazz as a featured vocalist with jazz vocal ensemble, Moore By Four. Minnesota Jazz Music Awards named him "Best Male Jazz Vocalist." He has performed in jazz festivals nationally and internationally with such legends as Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughn, Joe Williams, Carmen McCrae and Dee Dee Bridgewater. Solo recordings include *I Hear It, Why Try to Change Me Now*, and his first national release, *Evening Candlelight* (romantic ballads).

AUSTENE VAN (Peggy Clark) is a Penumbra Theatre Company member. Most recently, she co-directed *Black Nativity - A Homecoming*. Select acting credits at Penumbra include *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Zooman and the Sign*, *Dinah Was*, *The Trial...*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, and several productions of *Black Nativity*. She also performed in Penumbra's co-production with the Guthrie of *The Darker Face of the Earth*. Other stage credits include *Smokey Joe's Café*, *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings* and *Once on This Island* at the Children's Theatre Company, *The Dance on Widow's Row*, *Point of Revue*, *Two Queens One Castle*, and *Vices* at Mixed Blood, *Crowns* and *A Christmas Carol* at the Guthrie, *The Colored Museum* and *Spunk* at The Saint Louis Black Repertory Theatre, and *Hair* at Pantages. Television credits include *Vernie* and *The Shakedown*. Austene has performed throughout the United States and internationally as a singer, dancer and actress. Musical endeavors include singing on tour with Karyn White, and writing and co-producing her own album.

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LOU BELLAMY (Director) is Founder and Artistic Director of Penumbra Theatre Company. He has been a member of the University of Minnesota's faculty for 28 years and is currently appointed to the rank of Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance. Awards include the W. Harry Davis Foundation Award for Leadership in Afro-centric Education, Links Award in Recognition of Excellence in Black Theatre, a doctorate from Hamline University, the 2005 Ivey Lifetime Achievement Award, and the 2006 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award. Recent directing credits include *Two Trains Running* at the Signature Theatre in New York, *Jitney* at Kansas City Repertory Theatre and Arizona Theatre Company. Recent directing credits at Penumbra include *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*, *Zooman and the Sign*, and *Black Nativity - A Homecoming*. Acting credits include lead roles in *Fences*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Waiting in Vain*, and *Talking Bones*.

CHARLES RANDOLPH-WRIGHT (Playwright and Lyricist) is a writer, director, and producer for theatre, television, and film. Charles is a native of York, South Carolina, and a graduate of Duke University. He studied acting with the Royal Shakespeare Company in London and dance with the Alvin Ailey School in New York City. Charles was awarded a grant from the National Theatre Residency Program of Theatre Communications Group and the Pew Charitable Trusts for a residency at the American Conservatory Theatre, where he is an artistic associate. Charles is also an associate artist at Arena Stage and was awarded a grant from the NEA for their production of *Blue*. Awards include NAACP Image, Backstage Garland, Dean Goodman Choice, Bay Area Critics, Drama-Logue, LA Weekly Theatre, Robbie, Helen Hayes, Ovation, and Audelco. Charles also is the recipient of the Creative Spirit Award from the New Professional Theatre, and the S.C. Medal of Honor in the Arts. Charles' future stage productions include *Skindiver*, a rock cyber musical with Nona Hendryx, based on her acclaimed album of the same title, *A Waiter*, a new play with the Campo Santo Theatre in San Francisco, and *Deadlines*, a new musical with Kirsten Childs.

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NONA HENDRYX (Composer and Lyricist) rose to fame as part of Patti LaBelle & The Bluebelles (the sweethearts of The Apollo) and was inducted into The Rhythm & Blues Foundations' Hall of Fame in 1999. She also had a brilliant solo career spanning a variety of musical genres including heavy metal (Nona 1977), funk (Female Trouble), and New Age (SkinDiver). Her top ten hits include Bustin' Out, Keep It Confidential, Transformation, Why Should I Cry?, I Sweat (Goin' Thru the Motions), and Winds of Change. She has been a major force in American music and has collaborated with Arthur Baker, Prince, Peter Gabriel, Dan Hartman and The Talking Heads. In addition to writing all of the original music for *Blue* and co-writing all the lyrics, she has also collaborated with playwright Charles Randolph-Wright on the motion picture *On the One*. Ms. Hendryx is a Grammy Nominee for "Rock This House" (featuring Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones on guitar) and an Emmy Nominee for her collaboration with Jason Miles on the composition "Children of the World" recorded by Sounds of Blackness for "People," a Disney animated children's special.

SANFORD MOORE (Musical Director) is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Minnesota School of Music and Minister of Music for Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church. Musical Direction credits at Penumbra include *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Black Nativity - A Homecoming*, *Rollin on the T.O.B.A.*, and *Dinah Was*. Other credits include *Crowns*, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *Triumph of Love*, *As You Like It* at the Guthrie Theater, *2 Queens 1 Castle* at Mixed Blood Theater in Minneapolis and at Horizon Theater in Atlanta, Georgia, *The Last Minstrel Show* at the History Theater, and *Smokey Joe's Café* at Hey City Theater. Sanford is also co-creator of *Always and Forever* and *2-Gether* and *Living Beauty* at Illusion Theater.

HARRY WATERS JR. (Assistant Director) is currently on faculty at Macalester College in the Theater and Dance Department. He obtained his MFA in Directing in 2003 at UW-Madison. As an actor, he has appeared at numerous regional theaters. He has created roles at Arizona Theater Company, American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theater, TheaterWorks, San Jose Repertory, and The Mark Taper Forum. Most notably, he created the role of Belize in the world premiere of *Angels in America* at the Eureka Theater prior to Broadway and national acclaim. Harry also appeared in *Bill of (W)Rights* at Mixed Blood Theater. On film, he's appeared in *Back to the Future* as Marvin Berry singing "Earth Angel," for which he received a Gold Record. On television he starred in *What a Country!* and in *Adventures in Wonderland* as well as many featured roles. Most recently, Harry appeared in *The Falls* at the Guthrie Theatre and directed *Proof* at Macalester College.

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RONALD ALOIS SCHULTZ (Stage Manager) has been working as an actor, stage manager, production assistant, and sound board operator in the Twin Cities since 1992. A Company member of Penumbra Theatre, Ron has worked on over 60 productions at Penumbra including *Jitney!*, *Stage Directions*, and the 2006 production of *Ain't Misbehavin'*. He has also worked on productions at Mixed Blood, Illusion, Eye of the Storm, Fitzgerald, Pantages, Frank, and Alchemy theatres. Ron was the assistant stage manager for the Carlson Honors 2005 Awards for the Carlson Company at the State Theatre and was company manager of Pillsbury House Theatre's touring production *Breaking Ice* in 2003 and 2004. He provided technical support for Roxanne Wallace's *Evolution of a Soul Sista* at Patrick's Cabaret and recently designed the set for *Riff Raff* at Pillsbury House. Ron is currently pursuing his B.A. in Social Science and his Secondary Teacher Licensure at Metropolitan State University.

MAY MAHALA (Dramaturge) is a PhD candidate in Theatre Arts at the University of Minnesota. Her writing has appeared in *The Blue Earth Review*, *California Quarterly*, *Colere*, *NYU's Women and Performance Journal*, *Theatre Journal*, and *Xcp: Cross Cultural Poetics*. She has worked with The Illusion Theatre, New World Theatre, The Pillsbury House Theatre, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, Theatre Unbound, and Works/Plays. Her fellowships and awards include The August Wilson Fellowship at Penumbra Theatre, two Many Voices residencies from the Playwrights' Center, and first place in Garrison Keillor's Festival of Romantic Writing.

ERIKA K. DIXON-GOSS (American Sign Language Interpreter) has been the ASL Interpreter for Penumbra Theater for ten years. Erika has had the pleasure of interpreting works by the late August Wilson such as *Seven Guitars*, and *King Hedley II*. Most recently, she interpreted *Alter Boyz* at the Pantages Theatre. Erika also interprets for Theatre De La Jeune Lune, Hopkins Stages Theater, Plymouth Playhouse, and Anoka's Main Street Stage. In addition to being an interpreter, Erika has taken on a new role as Interim Assistant Company Manager for Penumbra.

MARK DOUGHERTY (Light Design) has been the Lighting Director and Resident Lighting Designer at Penumbra Theatre for the past five years. Select Penumbra design credits include *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Stage Directions*, *Rollin' on the T.O.B.A.*, *On the Open Road*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Two Trains Running*, *King Hedley II*, *Sex Diaries of an Infidel*, *Dinah Was*, and *Slippery When Wet*. Mark works as an Electrician at the Guthrie Theatre and The Children's Theatre. He has also designed at Theatre L' Homme Dieu, Guthrie Theatre 'Lab', and The Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson, WI. He is a graduate of St. Cloud State University.

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MARTIN GWINUP (Sound Design) is an associate professor in the Theatre Arts and Dance Department at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. He teaches Audio and Video Design and Production. He has also worked in the Twin Cities area as a freelance sound/video designer and technician for the past 18 years. He has worked for companies such as the Frank Theatre, History Theatre, Children's Theatre, Cricket Theatre, and Eye of the Storm, to name a few. *Blue* will be this tenth production with Penumbra Theatre Company. Recent designs at Penumbra include, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Black Nativity—A Celebration of Family, A Celebration for the Soul...Testify!*, *Rollin on the T.O.B.A.*, and *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*.

CHAD VAN KEKERIX (Scene Design) is a freelance designer and scenic artist who has crafted over 80 productions in the Twin Cities. Most recent designs include *Love, Janis* for the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, *The Mousetrap* for Theatre in the Round and *Marat Sade*. Designer and artist of the quilts on the walls of Penumbra Theatre, he also created and co-created the lobbies of Penumbra Theatre Company and Theatre in the Round, respectively. Chad has worked with various groups including Ordway Center, Actor's Theatre of Minnesota, Northwestern College, Youth Performance Company and The Bathhouse Theatre in Seattle. Career highlights include; *The Rainmaker*, *The Day King Died*, *Once on this Island*, *Candida*, and *Les Miserables*. Chad is excited to be making his Penumbra scene design debut.

DEIDREA WHITLOCK (Costume Design) received her B.F.A. from the Minneapolis College of Art & Design. She has designed costumes for several Penumbra Theatre productions including the 1986 production of *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Tracers*, *Black Nativity*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Fences*, *Charlie Parkers Celebrated Minstrel Show*, *African Company Presents Richard III*, *Waiting in Vain*, and *Talking Bones*. Other design projects include T. Mychael Rambo's "A Christmas With Love," Laurie Carlos' *Marion's Terrible Times of Joy*, and AGAPE Praise & Worship Dance Ensemble. She has also worked with the Guthrie Theatre, History Theater, Illusion Theater, Walker Art Center, and the Minneapolis and St. Paul Public schools. In addition, she designs couture and ready to wear fashions for various artist and clients.

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QUICK REFERENCE

- Production:** *Blue*
Written by Charles Randolph-Wright, Music by Nona Hendryx,
Lyrics by Nona Hendryx and Charles Randolph-Wright
- Director:** Lou Bellamy
- Musical Direction:** Sanford Moore
- Ensemble:** Sandy Adell (Tillie), Keith Bolden (Samuel Clark, Jr.),
Christiana Clark (LaTonya Dinkins),
Blaine Crawford (Reuben Clark/Youth),
Shawn Hamilton (Samuel Clark),
Namir Smallwood (Reuben Clark/Adult),
Dennis Spears (Blue Williams), & Austene Van (Peggy Clark)
- Design Team:** Mark Dougherty (Light Design),
Martin Gwinup (Sound Design)
Chad Van Kekerix (Scene Design),
Deidrea Whitlock (Costume Design)
- Dates:** February 15 – March 11, 2007
Previews February 13 & 14
Opening Night, Thursday, February 15 at 7:30 pm
- Performances:** Wednesdays 10:00am and 7:30pm
Thursdays 7:30pm
Fridays 8:00pm
Saturdays 8:00pm
Sundays 2:00pm and 7:30pm
- Tickets:** 651-224-3180 or penumbratheatre.org
- Price:** \$15 - \$30
- Theatre Location:** 270 North Kent Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102
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