

NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE

For Immediate Release

May 18, 2007

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Get Ready

Theirs is music to fall in love to

May 18, 2007; St. Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, the nation's preeminent African American theatre, proudly announces the opening of *Get Ready* written by Jaye T. Stewart and Joe Plummer on June 7, 2007. Lou Bellamy directs this lyrical comedy/drama with musical direction by Sanford Moore and choreography by Austene Van. The production will run **June 7 through July 1, 2007**.

Get Ready is a play about the relationship between musicians and the struggle for control over the music they make. Playwrights Stewart and Plummer offer us an intergenerational take on this issue by creating characters that span three generations. The Doves, middle-aged crooners whose heyday was circa 1960, embody the essence of performers like Al Green, Otis Redding, and The Platters. Their dance instructor, Knobby Coles, comes from an earlier generation of great vaudevillian performers such as The Nicholas brothers and Bill "Bo Jangles" Robinson. Knobby's employee, J.R., is a young man who dreams of getting his break from a music contest much like "American Idol." Each character in this play is involved in their own personal struggle to find their own voice and to be adequately and fairly compensated for their artistic work.

In this story, The Doves' hit song from their days of glory has made a comeback, climbing to the top of the music charts. A reunion tour is scheduled and the five Doves get back together. They may be a bit rusty, but they still have the magic – that wonderful combination of soulfulness and sweet sincerity that made the ladies swoon. Along with the old music come the old conflicts too. Their dreams, egos and loyalties require a reckoning with the past. Told with humor and real tenderness, *Get Ready* is the story of legendary musicians stepping once again into the light.

Director Lou Bellamy says, "This season, in celebration of our 30th Anniversary, we set out to honor the rich history of African American musical entertainment. *Get Ready* offers a wonderful close to the season as it addresses the struggle to find dignity and strength through musical expression, recognizing music as both highly personal and as a method of forging connections and community with others."

The star studded cast includes: Lucas Bellamy, Jamecia Bennett, Benny S. Cannon, James Craven, Shawn Hamilton, T. Mychael Rambo, Dennis W. Spears, and J.D. Steele.

ARTISTS' BIOS:

LUCAS BELLAMY (J.R.) is excited to return to Penumbra Theatre Company's stage after a fourteen year hiatus. He was last seen at Penumbra in 1993 in Rebecca Rice's *Waiting in Vain*.

JAMECIA BENNETT (Eva Dee) Jamecia is a manager, singer, songwriter and producer who has sung background for superstars like Janet Jackson, Luther Vandross, Patti Labelle, and Lionel Richie, just to name a few. She is also an original member of the Grammy Award winning group The Sounds of Blackness, and is a featured soloist on the hit by James Grier & Co, "Don't Give Up." Jamecia has also performed in Tyler Perry's shows including, *I know I've Been Changed*, *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*, and *Madea's Family Reunion*.

BENNY S. CANNON (Corbierre Johnson) is a Penumbra Company member. Select Penumbra credits include, *On the Open Road*, *Black Nativity*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Two Trains Running*, *A Love Song for Miss Lydia*, *Riff's*, and *Pill Hill*. Other Minnesota theater credits include *Oedipus* at the Guthrie Theater, *The Wild Party* at the Fitzgerald, *The Meeting* at the Great American History Theatre, *Jus'for a While* at the Illusion Theater and many others. Regional Theater credits include, *I am a Man* at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, *Homebound* at The Milwaukee Rep, *The Piano Lesson* at the Portland Rep and *Boseman and Lena* at the St. Louis Black Rep Co. Television and film credits include *Suddenly Susan*, *The Wayan Brothers*, *Hangin with Mr. Cooper*, *Crossing the Bridge* and many others.

JAMES CRAVEN (Knobby Coles) is a long time Penumbra Company member. Recent Penumbra credits include *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*, *Zooman and the Sign* and Penumbra's co-production of *Jitney* with the Kansas City Repertory Theater and Arizona Theater Company. He is a 2005 recipient of the Spenser Cherashore Fund.

SHAWN HAMILTON (Vernon Saunders) has been seen at Penumbra in *Blue*, *Stage Directions*, *Seven Guitars*, and *Black Nativity*. Other local theatres he has worked with include Mixed Blood, Guthrie Theater, Illusion Theater, Children's Theatre, 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.

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T. MYCHAEL RAMBO (Harvey Bunch) is an actor, vocalist, educator, and Penumbra Company member. Select Penumbra credits include *Tambourines to Glory*, *Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope*, *Spunk*, *Last Minstrel Show*, *Jitney*, and his role(s) in *Black Nativity*. Recent Penumbra credits include *Dinah Was*, *Zooman and the Sign* and *Ain't Misbehavin'*. He has also performed with Guthrie Theater, Illusion Theater, Minnesota Opera, Ordway Music Theatre, Mixed Blood Theatre, Park Square Theatre and Hey City Theatre. T. Mychael has also performed with a number of regional theatre companies, several national and regional tours, at Carnegie Hall with the Minnesota Orchestra and internationally throughout Canada, Europe, Africa and Brazil. Television credits include national and local commercials, the HBO mini-series *Laurel Avenue*, *Endeavor*, and *I Led Two Lives*. Film credits include *Mighty Ducks*, *Crossing the Bridge*, *Grumpy Old Men*, *The Cure*, *Equinox*, *Wooly Boys* and *Justice*, winner of several national independent film festival awards and nominated for a NAACP Image Award.

DENNIS W. SPEARS (Frankie Saunders) has appeared on the Penumbra stage this season in *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Black Nativity--A Homecoming* and *Blue*. Other acting credits include *Ain't Misbehavin'* at Actor's Theatre of Louisville, *Crowns* at the Guthrie Theater 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."

J.D. STEELE (Roscoe "Reds" Walker) is perhaps most well known as a member and songwriter of the world renowned group, The Steeles. He developed his skills as an arranger and songwriter at the age of 16, and went on to arrange for movies such as *Corrina Corrina*, *Blankman*, and *Hoop Dreams*. He was also nominated for an Emmy for the PBS version of *Gospel at Colonus*. J.D. developed the choral group, Shangilia, in Nairobi, and the group made its debut in Nairobi in January of 2005. J.D. has been commissioned on ten original musicals, most recently by the History Theatre in St. Paul, and Mixed Blood Theatre in Minneapolis. He has performed and recorded with Prince, Donald Fagen, on Broadway and around the world. He is a recipient of the 2003 Bush Composer Fellowship.

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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 29 years and is currently appointed to the rank of Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance. Awards include the 2007 OBIE for Direction, the Lucille Lortel for Outstanding Revival in 2007, the 2006 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, the 2005 Ivey Lifetime Achievement Award, the W. Harry Davis Foundation Award for Leadership in Afro-centric Education, Links Award in Recognition of Excellence in Black Theatre, and a doctorate from Hamline University. 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*.

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 *Blue, 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*, and *As You Like It* at the Guthrie Theater, *Two Queens One Castle* at Mixed Blood Theatre 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 Together* and *Living Beauty* at Illusion Theater.

AUSTENE VAN (Choreographer) is a Penumbra Theatre Company member. Most recently, she co-directed *Black Nativity--A Homecoming*. Select acting credits at Penumbra include *Blue, 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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MARY K. WINCHELL (Stage Manager) is in her 20th season with Penumbra. Select Penumbra credits include the world premiere and national tour of *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*, produced in collaboration with Trinity Repertory Theatre, *Fences* at Penumbra and the Guthrie, *The Last Minstrel Show*, *Tracers*, *Mighty Gents*, *Ceremonies in Dark Old Men*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Seven Guitars, for colored girls...*, *The Darker Face of the Earth*, *Jitney*, *Black Nativity*, *Two Trains Running*, *King Hedley II*, *Reflections of Black Nativity*, and *Dinah Was*. In addition to her work at Penumbra, Mary has stage managed at the Children's Theatre Company, Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami, Jungle Theater, Super Bowl XXVIII half-time show *Winter Magic*, Macy's. Glamorama and served as company manager for Dorothy Hamill's *Nutcracker on Ice*. Most recently she stage managed *Iron Kisses* at Illusion Theater.

C. LANCE BROCKMAN (Scenic Design) is a Professor of theatre design at the University of Minnesota where he has been on the faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance for 34 years. His research interest is in the historic methods of scenic art used to create illusionary background for opera houses, vaudeville, circuses, and fraternal initiations. His efforts led to the discovery and subsequent exhibits titled: *The Twin City Scenic Collection: Popular Entertainment 1895-1929* and *Theatre of the Fraternity: Staging the Ritual Space of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry 1896-1929*. Both exhibits and national tours were supported by grants from the National Endowment of the Humanities. In addition, Lance nationally provides master classes and workshops on historical painting techniques and maintains an active design career. Brockman is a member of the United States Institute for Theatre Technology—a professional organization that represents 3500 designer and technicians from North America.

MARK DOUGHERTY (Light Design) has been the Lighting Director/Resident Lighting Designer at Penumbra Theatre for the past five years. Select Penumbra design credits include *Blue*, *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, Wisconsin. He is a graduate of St. Cloud State University.

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 technology, 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. Recent designs at Penumbra include, *Blue*, *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*. *Get Ready* will be his twelfth production with Penumbra Theatre Company.

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MATHEW J. LEFEBVRE (Costume Design) has designed several productions for Penumbra including *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*, *On the Open Road*, *Black Eagles*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and *Jitney*. Off Broadway designs include *Two Trains Running* at Signature Theatre and *Bach at Leipzig* at New York Theatre Workshop. Set design includes Shapiro and Smith Dance, *Anytown* and *Notes from a Séance* at the Joy. He has designed the costumes for fifteen productions at the Guthrie Theatre including *She Loves Me*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wintertime*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, and *School for Scandal*. Other regional credits include *Tartuffe*, *A Flea in Her Ear*, *Bach at Leipzig* at Milwaukee Rep, *Jitney*, *Raisin In The Sun*, and *Two Trains Running* at The Kansas City Rep. He has also designed for Arizona Theatre Company, Trinity Rep, Theatre De La Jeune Lune, Geffen Playhouse, and American Players Theatre.

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 Theater, 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.

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QUICK REFERENCE

- Production:** *Get Ready*
Written by Jaye T. Stewart and Joe Plummer
- Director:** Lou Bellamy
- Musical Direction:** Sanford Moore
- Choreography:** Austene Van
- Ensemble:** Lucas Bellamy (J.R.),
Jamecia Bennett (Eva Dee)
Benny S. Cannon (Corbierre Johnson)
James Craven (Knobby Coles)
Shawn Hamilton (Vernon Saunders)
T. Mychael Rambo (Harvey Bunch)
Dennis Spears (Frankie Saunders),
J.D. Steele (Roscoe “Reds” Walker)
- Design Team:** Mark Dougherty (Light Design)
Martin Gwinup (Sound Design)
Lance C. Brockman (Scene Design)
Mathew J. LeFebvre Costume Design)
- Dates:** June 7 – July 1, 2007
Previews June 5 & 6
Opening Night, Thursday, June 7 at 7:30 pm
- Performances:** Tuesdays at 7:30 pm
Wednesdays 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
- Media Contact:** Julie McGarvie, Marketing Director, 651-228-6784
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