

NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE

For Immediate Release

May 30, 2007

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2007-2008 Season Announcement

May 30, 2007; Saint Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, the nation's preeminent African American theatre, proudly announced its 2007-2008 Season today.

- ◆ ***REDSHIRTS*** written by Dana Yeaton, directed by Lou Bellamy
September 6 through September 30, 2007
- ◆ ***Black Nativity: Twenty Years of Holiday Cheer***
co-conceived by T. Mychael Rambo & Lou Bellamy, directed by Austene Van
November 29 through December 30, 2007
- ◆ ***The Piano Lesson*** by August Wilson, directed by Lou Bellamy
February 21 through March 16, 2008
- ◆ ***Gem of the Ocean*** by August Wilson, directed by Lou Bellamy
April 18 through May 11, 2008 at the Guthrie Theater, McGuire Proscenium Stage

Founder and Artistic Director Lou Bellamy stated, "On our stage, African American traditions, rites of passage, and celebrations are brought to life. Penumbra is a keeper of the stories and we take this responsibility seriously. The rigor with which we approach the work and its content is unparalleled. Across the nation, folks are standing up to take notice, and they're pointing to St. Paul."

Penumbra's 2007-2008 Season opens with the world premiere of Dana Yeaton's ***REDSHIRTS***, co-produced with Round House Theatre, Bethesda, Maryland. The cast includes James T. Alfred, James Craven, Kimberly Gilbert, Cedric Mays, Will Sallee, Kim Schraf, Regina Marie Williams, and Ahanti Young. The play will run at Penumbra and then travel to play at Round House. "The collaboration is important because it meshes the talents and expertise of two nationally recognized companies," Artistic Director Lou Bellamy said. "The partnership is another opportunity for Penumbra to share the signature style which we have perfected over the last 30 years with a national audience."

This season marks the 20th anniversary for the holiday tradition, ***Black Nativity***, conceived by T. Mychael Rambo and Lou Bellamy, directed by Austene Van, with musical direction by Sanford Moore. This family favorite reunites the Twin Cities' finest musicians, jazz and gospel singers, and members of TU Dance Company to celebrate the season with style.

The season launches the **August Wilson 20th Century Cycle** that traces black American life decade by decade from 1900 to 2000. Lou Bellamy will direct two of these plays each season for the next five years starting with *The Piano Lesson* and *Gem of the Ocean*. Having produced more Wilson plays than any other theatre in the world, Penumbra produced *The Piano Lesson* only once in 1993. The playwright himself called this production his “favorite staging and a model of style and eloquence that would inspire my future work.”

The season closes with Penumbra and the Guthrie joining forces to present the regional premiere of *Gem of the Ocean* at the Guthrie Theater on the Maguire Proscenium Stage. “The collaboration allows us to come together to create something neither of us could do alone – offering the community a unique opportunity to experience Wilson’s work at its best,” stated Bellamy.

Anointed as a definitive interpreter of August Wilson, Lou Bellamy has been rigorously recruited to direct at theatres around the country, most recently with his New York City debut of August Wilson’s *Two Trains Running* at the Signature Theatre in 2006. Bellamy received an Obie Award for Best Direction for his staging of this production. [Click here for more information](#). In addition to the prestigious Obie award, the production also received a Lucille Lortel Award for Best Revival. In the same year, Bellamy also directed a sold out run of *Jitney* at the Kansas City Repertory Theatre, a production that also went to the Arizona Theatre Company in Phoenix and Tucson.

In honor of Penumbra’s 20th Anniversary, Wilson stated, “We are what we imagine ourselves to be and we can only imagine what we know to be possible. The founding of Penumbra Theatre enlarged that possibility. And its corresponding success provokes the community to a higher expectation of itself. I became a playwright because I saw where my chosen profession was being sanctioned by a group of black men and women who were willing to invest their lives and their talent in assuming a responsibility for our presence in the world and the conduct of our industry as black Americans. It was one of, if not the only field endeavor, I saw being sanctioned by blacks. It was a platform from which we might investigate ourselves, our manners and way of life, our history, our failures and our triumphs. Penumbra is fortunate to have Lou Bellamy to guide and encourage that investigation, and to open avenues for its growth and expansion. To provide that platform is no small accomplishment.”

The 2007-2008 Season will mark the 31st year of Penumbra Theatre Company, one of the few surviving professional African American theatres in the nation borne of the Black Arts Movement. Penumbra is fueled by the belief that the ethics and aesthetics of an artist must be one. Out of this comes mission driven art, art for social change, art that is critical, forceful and demands response – the kind of art that creates and sustains a community. For 31 years, Penumbra has provided a consistently clear message that the African American experience is rich, dynamic and critical to the American theatre canon.

PENUMBRA THEATRE 2007-2008 SEASON

Presented by Star Tribune and Minnesota Monthly

REDSHIRTS by Dana Yeaton, directed by Lou Bellamy

September 6 through September 30, 2007

Dante Greene is a star rookie in the Tennessee Southern stable. His climb to the top is cut short when an English professor accuses him of plagiarism, an expulsive offense. Yeaton's provocative new play tackles the recruitment of black athletes by universities that care more for commercial success than intellectual integrity. A world premiere co-produced by Penumbra and Round House.

Black Nativity: Twenty Years of Holiday Cheer co-conceived by T. Mychael Rambo & Lou Bellamy, directed by Austene Van

November 29 through December 30, 2007

Penumbra celebrates its 20th year of ringing in the holiday season in serious style with the finest musicians, jazz and gospel singers and dancers the Twin Cities has to offer. This year's "Black Nativity" visits Grandma Walker, a recent widow. The bonds of family, strength of tradition and power of faith lift her from the depths of grief to the rafters with the joyful spirit of the season. Featuring the choreography of TU Dance Company!

The Piano Lesson by August Wilson, directed by Lou Bellamy

February 21 through March 16, 2008

The piano that sits in the salon of the Charles home is very valuable. For Bernice, it holds the spirit of her grandparents, sold away in exchange for it during slavery. For her brother, Boy Willie, it holds the key to his freedom from the burden of sharecropping for a meager wage. The struggle between the siblings over the symbolic and literal value of the piano escalates into a conflict that threatens to tear the family apart. An opportunity to witness Wilson's work at its definitive best, the playwright himself called Penumbra's 1993 production his "favorite staging [and] a model of style and eloquence that would inspire my future work." A Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, *The Piano Lesson* is the story of a family haunted by the living legacy of American slavery.

Gem of the Ocean by August Wilson, directed by Lou Bellamy

April 18 through May 11, 2008 at the Guthrie Theater on the McGuire Proscenium Stage

With *Gem of the Ocean*, two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson begins his century-long cycle chronicling black American life. Bewildered by the collapse of the old slave regime, the first generation of black Americans recently freed from slavery are unprepared for the backlash against their newly acquired freedom by whites. Many venture north and find themselves at Aunt Ester's door, seeking solace, advice, or a place to heal. Aunt Ester makes room in the world for those cast aside. She examines and treats wounded souls. Her wisdom is ancient, timeless, connected to the source from which black Americans had been taken. Join us for the regional premiere of August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* and meet Aunt Ester, keeper of the flame.