

## NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE

*For Immediate Release*

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### **2008-2009 Season Announcement**

May 7, 2008; Saint Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, the nation's preeminent African American theatre, proudly announced its 2008-2009 Season.

- ◆ ***Fences*** by August Wilson, directed by Lou Bellamy  
**August 21 through September 21, 2008**
- ◆ ***Black Nativity—Hear Again the Christmas Story!***  
Co-Conceived by T. Mychael Rambo & Lou Bellamy, directed by Austene Van  
**November 28 through December 28, 2008**
- ◆ ***The Whipping Man*** by Matthew Lopez, directed by Lou Bellamy  
**February 19 through March 15, 2009**
- ◆ ***Radio Golf*** by August Wilson, directed by Lou Bellamy  
**May 7 through June 7, 2009**

**Tickets on sale March 12, 2008 through the Penumbra Theatre Box Office at 651-224-3180 or at [www.penumbratheatre.org](http://www.penumbratheatre.org).**

### **SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

- ◆ ***A Raisin in the Sun*** by Lorraine Hansberry, directed by Lou Bellamy  
A Penumbra Theatre production presented at the Guthrie Theater  
**March 13 through April 11, 2009**

**Tickets for *A Raisin in the Sun* go on sale July 7, 2008 through the Guthrie Theater Box Office at 612-377-2224 or at [www.guthrietheater.org](http://www.guthrietheater.org).**

Founder and Artistic Director Lou Bellamy stated, "The plays selected this season emphasize legacy. Each of these playwrights deftly illustrates that the ethical fabric binding a culture together is made from the lessons learned by those who came before. As we examine the African American interpretations of this experience, we find a story relevant to many Americans – the choice between your dream and your family, the choice between wealth and integrity, the choice between your future and your past."

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The season opens with the Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Fences*, by August Wilson, directed by Lou Bellamy. Set in 1957, *Fences* tells the story of Troy Maxon, a baseball player whose prime came before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier. When his rapid rise through the Negro leagues hits the ceiling of racial prejudice, Troy is forced to let go of his dream of major league success. This is a powerful and heartbreaking tale of a man who by all rights should have been an American legend.

This season marks the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary for the holiday tradition, *Black Nativity*, co-conceived by T. Mychael Rambo and Lou Bellamy, directed by Austene Van, with musical direction by Sanford Moore. The story follows Grandma Walker, a recent widow so swept up in the grief of loss, she has barely noticed the season at all. Her family surprises her, bringing music, cheer, good food and lots of laughter into the house. 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 regional premiere of *The Whipping Man* by Matthew Lopez, directed by Lou Bellamy, is a highlight of the season. A historical drama, this play is set in 1865, the year American slaves were set free throughout the South after centuries of bondage. The play tells the story of three men: A Jewish Confederate soldier and two of his former slaves, also Jewish, who wait for their families to return. As they wait, they explore their past and contemplate their future in a suddenly and fundamentally new world—for the first time they face each other as free men.

*Radio Golf* was the last play written by August Wilson. It also marks the final decade in August Wilson's *Twentieth Century Cycle*. This play tells the story of Harmon Wilks, a man struggling to forge his own path in the shadow of his father's legacy. Harmon wants to become Pittsburgh's first black mayor. He sees the Hill District as an untapped resource and his ticket to win the election. His plan to develop the area will gentrify the cultural heart of black Pittsburgh. As he makes his run for office, the neighborhood in which he grew up begins to groan under the weight of his ambition and Harmon learns that not all that glitters is gold.

The season includes a special presentation of Penumbra's production of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* at the Guthrie Theater. This play tells the story of Lena Younger, a recent widow who wants to use her husband's insurance money to buy a home for her family. But when a white representative of the neighborhood "welcoming committee" presents the Younger's with an offer to buy them out of their home to prevent integration in their community, the dream of the house quickly becomes a nightmare. This landmark play opened on Broadway in 1959 and was the first Broadway production to feature an all-black principal cast, a black playwright and a black director. It was nominated for four Tony awards. Penumbra's production presented at the Guthrie will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the inspiring classic.

The 2008-2009 Season continues Penumbra's commitment to produce the entire **August Wilson *Twentieth Century Cycle*** that traces black American life decade by decade from 1900 to 2000. Penumbra will stage the *Twentieth Century Cycle* in its entirety by producing two Wilson plays each season within a five year time frame. The Cycle was launched last season with the *The Piano Lesson* at Penumbra and *Gem of the Ocean*, presented at the Guthrie Theater. This season, Lou Bellamy will direct *Fences* and *Radio Golf*, both at home on the Penumbra stage.

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Anointed as a definitive interpreter of August Wilson, Lou Bellamy has been rigorously recruited to direct at theatres around the country. Last season, Penumbra joined forces with the Guthrie Theater to stage the upper Midwest premiere of *Gem of the Ocean*. Bellamy's New York City debut of August Wilson's *Two Trains Running* at the Signature Theatre in 2006 received an Obie Award for Best Direction and 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 2008-2009 Season will mark the 32<sup>nd</sup> 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 32 years, Penumbra has provided a consistently clear message that the African American experience is rich, dynamic and critical to the American theatre canon.

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***PENUMBRA THEATRE 2008-2009 SEASON***

***Fences***

**August 21 through September 21, 2008**

By August Wilson, Directed by Lou Bellamy

Set in 1957, *Fences* is the story of a Troy Maxon, a baseball player whose prime came before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier. When his rapid rise through the Negro leagues hits the ceiling of racial prejudice, Troy is forced to let go of his dream of major league success. A Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Fences* is the heartbreaking story of a man who by all rights should have been an American legend.

***Black Nativity—Hear Again the Christmas Story!***

**November 28 through December 28, 2008**

Co-conceived by T. Mychael Rambo and Lou Bellamy

Directed by Austene Van, Musical Direction by Sanford Moore

This gospel musical celebrates the bonds of family, the power of faith and the strength of tradition, showcasing the best jazz and gospel singers of the Twin Cities and the stirring choreography of TU Dance. This season marks the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Twin Cities' favorite holiday tradition!

***The Whipping Man***

**February 19 through March 15, 2009**

By Matthew Lopez, Directed by Lou Bellamy

After four years of Civil War, Caleb DeLeon returns to his father's plantation in Richmond, Virginia badly wounded. There is one familiar face amidst the wreckage: Simon, the former slave who raised him. Out of the rubble of the fallen South, Simon and Caleb face one another for the first time as free men. This play tells the harrowing story of one family straining to adjust to the end of America's darkest era.

***A Raisin in the Sun***

**March 13 through April 11, 2009**

By Lorraine Hansberry, Directed by Lou Bellamy

Lena Younger wants to buy a home for her family. But when a white representative of the neighborhood "welcoming committee" presents the Younger's with an offer to buy them out of their home to prevent integration in their community, the dream of the house quickly becomes a nightmare. Penumbra's production presented at the Guthrie will celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the inspiring classic.

***Radio Golf***

**May 7 through June 7, 2009**

By August Wilson, Directed by Lou Bellamy

A star on the rise, Harmon Wilks wants to become Pittsburgh's first black mayor. He sees the Hill District as an untapped resource and his ticket to win the election. As he makes his run for office, the neighborhood in which he grew up begins to groan under the weight of his ambition and Harmon learns that not all that glitters is gold. Set in 1997, this is the story of a man struggling to forge his own path in the shadow of his father's legacy.