



For more information call:
Julie McGarvie 651.288.6784
julie.mcgarvie@penumbratheatre.org

Lee Henderson 612.225.6142
leeh@guthrietheater.org
Melodie Bahan 612.225.6140
melodieb@guthrietheater.org

January 20, 2009
Press Release #1286

**PENUMBRA THEATRE MARKS 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF
LORRAINE HANSBERRY'S
A RAISIN IN THE SUN,
BRINGING HIGHLY-LAUDED CO-PRODUCTION TO MINNEAPOLIS**

**Preview March 12; Opening March 13;
Playing through April 11, 2009**

(*Minneapolis/St. Paul*) The Guthrie is proud to present Penumbra Theatre's production of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, directed by **Lou Bellamy**. A co-production with Arizona Theatre Company and The Cleveland Play House, this presentation marks the 50th anniversary of the show's groundbreaking Broadway opening, and arrives at the Guthrie on the heels of two highly-lauded regional runs in Ohio and Arizona. *A Raisin in the Sun* previews March 12, opens March 13 and plays through April 11, 2009 on the McGuire Proscenium Stage. Single tickets are priced from \$24 to \$60, with opening night prices ranging from \$49 to \$70. Tickets are now on sale through the Guthrie Box Office at 612.377.2224, toll-free 877.44.STAGE, 612.225.6244 (Group Sales) and online at www.guthrietheater.org.

A recent widow, Lena Younger (**Franchelle Stewart Dorn**) wants to use her husband's insurance money to buy a home for her family, freeing them from the cramped tenement in which she, her two children, daughter-in-law and grandson live. Her son, Walter Lee (**David Alan Anderson**), is

determined to invest the money in a business - an opportunity for him to be his own man and not just the driver for his white boss. Lena refuses; in her eyes a house is a sturdy thing to build a dream on, one that can relieve the strains that poverty has put on the family. But when a white representative of the neighborhood "welcoming committee" presents the Youngers 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.

The title comes from the opening lines of "Harlem," a poem by Langston Hughes ("What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun?"). Throughout the play, the idea of deferred dreams is a prominent theme, as each member of the Younger family attempts to find his or her place amidst a number of difficult situations. While their future neighbors resist the Youngers' move, Walter Lee for the first time begins to value what money can't buy, and in the process achieves a new level of self respect and pride.

The cast also features **Steven Nicholas Jackson** (Travis), **Kyle Haden** (George Murchison), **Bakesta King** (Beneatha), **Erika LaVonn** (Ruth), **Adeoye Mabogunje** (Joseph Asagai), **Patrick O'Brien** (Karl Linder) and **Damron Russell Armstrong** (Bobo).

Bellamy is joined by an artistic team that includes **Vicki M. Smith** (Scenic Designer), **Mathew J. LeFebvre** (Costume Designer), **Michelle Habeck** (Lighting Designer), **James C. Swonger** (Sound Designer), **Dominic Taylor** (Assistant Director), **John Kingsbury** (Stage Manager), **Justin Hossle** (Assistant Stage Manager) and **Tiffany K. Orr** (Assistant Stage Manager).

For *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry drew from an incident in her own childhood that profoundly affected her family's life. In defiance of the "restrictive covenants" in many real estate contracts of that era that barred blacks from most desirable residential neighborhoods, Carl Hansberry, Sr., moved his family to an all-white area. Mobs gathered outside the Hansberrys' new home, and 8-year-old Lorraine was almost struck by a brick hurled through a window. The family was finally evicted by Illinois authorities, but Carl Hansberry and NAACP lawyers fought the state court decision all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, ultimately winning a landmark decision prohibiting restrictive racial covenants (Hansberry v. Lee, 1940). Hansberry would later write to her mother about the play: "[it] will help a lot of people understand that we have among our

downtrodden ranks people who are the very essence of human dignity. That is what – after all the laughter and the tears – the play is supposed to say.”

A Raisin in the Sun was nominated for four Tony awards when it opened on Broadway in 1959, lauded by *The New York Times* as a show that “changed American theater forever.” For the first time in history a production hailed an all-black principal cast, a black director and a black playwright. Its 29-year-old author became the youngest American and the first black playwright to win the New York Drama Critics’ Best Play of the Year citation. Marking its 50th anniversary, *A Raisin in the Sun* brings to life the inspiring classic story about a working class black family struggling to make it in America.

About Penumbra Theatre Company

For 30 years, Penumbra has been a vibrant voice in American theatre - especially here in Minnesota as the state’s only professional African American theatre company. Founded in 1976, Bellamy rooted the theatre in the tenets of the Black Arts Movement – art of, by and for the black community – created by artists whose ethics and aesthetics were one. Out of this came mission driven art, art for social change, art that was critical, forceful and demanded response, art that created and sustained a community. The times were controversial in 1976 but the time is no less controversial today. Of the 200 black theatres borne of the movement, less than a dozen remain active; and of those survivors, only Penumbra is dedicated to cultural authenticity of those that are largely undocumented and invisible. On stage, Penumbra illuminates the universality of the human condition through the prism of the African American experience. This unique signature style resonates with audiences, critics, and artists across the nation. It is what distinguishes Penumbra from other black theatres and other theatres that present works by and with black artists. It is a forum that continues to flourish - where powerful and provocative art stimulates open and honest dialogue around issues of race.

Recognized nationally as the preeminent African American theatre, Penumbra is acclaimed for its high quality mission driven art that exists to benefit the communities it serves. Productions make the top ten lists annually and generate dialogue on issues of racism through its education and outreach programs as well as through public radio discussions and news articles generated by the issues presented in the plays.

About the Guthrie

The Guthrie Theater, founded in 1963, is an American center for theater performance, production, education and professional training. The Guthrie is dedicated to producing the great works of dramatic literature, developing the work of contemporary playwrights and cultivating the next generation of theater artists. Led by Director Joe Dowling since 1995, the Guthrie opened a new three-theater home on the banks of the Mississippi River in Minneapolis in June 2006.

The Guthrie is located at 818 South 2nd Street (at Chicago Avenue), in downtown Minneapolis. To purchase tickets or season subscriptions call the Guthrie Box Office between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m. daily at 612.377.2224 or toll-free 877.44.STAGE. For more information, or to purchase tickets online, visit www.guthrietheater.org.

THE GUTHRIE PRESENTS
A PENUMBRA THEATRE PRODUCTION OF
A RAISIN IN THE SUN
BY LORRAINE HANSBERRY
DIRECTED BY LOU BELLAMY

Preview: March 12, 2009 7:30 p.m.

Opening Night: March 13, 2009 7:30 p.m.

Closing: April 11, 2009 7:30 p.m.

Location: Guthrie Theater
818 South 2nd Street
Minneapolis, MN 55415

TICKETS: Single tickets priced at \$24 - \$60, opening night \$49 - \$70
Guthrie Box Office: 612.377.2224 or 877.44.STAGE
Group Sales: 612.225.6244 or 877.225.6211
Box Office hours: 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. daily
Tickets may also be purchased online at www.guthrietheater.org.

Performance Schedule: Tuesday through Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.
Sundays at 7 p.m.
Matinees on selected Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays at 1 p.m.

ASL Performances

Saturday, April 4 at 1 p.m.

Audio Described Performances

Saturday, April 4 at 1 p.m., sensory tour at 10:30 a.m.

Post-Play Discussions

Saturday, March 28 (1 p.m. show)

Sunday, March 29 (1 p.m. show)

Penumbra Theatre's 2008-09 season is presented by *Star Tribune* and *Minnesota Monthly*
A Raisin in the Sun is sponsored by RBC Wealth Management.

###