

## NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE

*For Immediate Release*

March 27, 2006

**Contact:** Julie McGarvie, Director of Marketing  
651-290-8686 x250  
[julie.mcgarvie@penumbratheatre.org](mailto:julie.mcgarvie@penumbratheatre.org)

**Tickets:** 651-224-3180 or [penumbratheatre.org](http://penumbratheatre.org)



### OBIE AWARD-WINNING PLAY

*"Zooman and the Sign"*

*Immediate, Tragic, Inspirational*

**March 27, 2006; St. Paul, MN:** Penumbra Theatre Company, the nation's preeminent African American theatre, proudly announces the opening of *Zooman and the Sign*, written by Charles Fuller, and directed by Lou Bellamy on **April 14, 2006**. Amidst the daily news stories of neighborhood violence and gang related deaths, the staging of this drama burns with topical urgency. *Zooman and the Sign* tells the story of a tragic death of an innocent child transforming a neighborhood. The story centers on the Tate family's struggle to find the killer of their little girl, shot by a wayward bullet from the gun of a gang leader. What used to be a compassionate black community has been rendered powerless by recurring gang violence and police apathy. Rueben Tate's pleas to his neighbors to come forward with information about the killer of his child are met with icy refusals and simple indifference. Racked with a sense of helplessness, he posts a plea for humanity that rouses an emotionally ravaged neighborhood to its feet.

Director Lou Bellamy says, "Our communities have always been challenged by external threats, but over the past several years they have been put under siege from within. Often we dehumanize the threat so that our reactions, our anger, fear, or apathy, seem justified. This play forces us to consider how overwhelming the problem can be, but remains unrelenting in its demand for the recognition of humanity on both sides." This is the second staging of *Zooman and the Sign* at Penumbra, the first being part of the 1982-83 season. That earlier staging electrified audiences, many of whom were frustrated with the apathy of police and leadership forces as the conditions within our local communities depressed into something unrecognizable, terrifying and very sad. Unfortunately, the issues of neighborhood and gang violence have continued to plague the safety and well being within the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota. Bellamy says, "It is becoming increasingly more common that our youth are acting out with extreme violence while we seem struck dumb by the death of an innocent like 11-year-old Tyesha Edwards, like Michael Zebuhr or astonished by tragedies such as Columbine or Red Lake." Once again, Penumbra is compelled to bring this drama back to the stage to confront issues of racism and poverty, encourage dialogue, and inspire social change.

\*\*\**MORE*\*\*\*

To facilitate dialogue and close the distance between the audience, artists, and issues presented in the play as well as provide a safe place to express oneself, Penumbra will offer seven **Talk Backs**, on the evenings of April 12, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22, and 27. Participating panelists include Al McFarlane, publisher of Insight News; John Harrington, Saint Paul Chief of Police; Spike Moss, civil rights activist; Tyrone Terrill, Saint Paul Director of the Human Rights; and Ava Brown, victim of gang violence. Please note that the panelists vary for each Talk Back so check the Penumbra website for details.

Extensive and informative, **Penumbra's Study Guide** on this play that can be downloaded free at:

[http://penumbratheatre.org/downloads/studyguides/Zooman\\_Study\\_Guide.pdf](http://penumbratheatre.org/downloads/studyguides/Zooman_Study_Guide.pdf).

The **Penumbra Symposia, COMMUNITY-IN-ACTION: Response to the Past Repeating in the Present**, will be hosted by Macalester College on Wednesday, April 19, 2006 at the Weyerhaeuser Chapel. A meet and greet with food will take place in the lower level of the Chapel at 5:30 pm, followed by a panel presentation in the sanctuary of the Chapel at 7:00 p.m. Professor Harry Waters Jr., from the Theatre and Dance Department at Maclester College will serve as moderator, and the key presenter will be Dr. Baron Kelly, Professor at Chapman University. The symposium will provide a historic opportunity to challenge the way we look at community reaction to changes in the current challenges with gangs, law enforcement and civic responsibility to our neighborhoods. The symposium is free and open to the public.

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## *Quick Reference*

<b>Production:</b>	<i>Zooman and the Sign</i>
<b>Producer and Director:</b>	Lou Bellamy
<b>Ensemble:</b>	James Craven (Rueben Tate) Tisch Jones (Grace Georges) Nathanial Ndosi (Russell Adams) Faye Price (Rachel Tate) T. Mychael Rambo (Emmett Tate) Evan Salone (Victor Tate) Austene Van (Ash Boswell) Kevin D. West (Donald Jackson) Ahanti Young (Zooman)
<b>Design Team:</b>	Mark Dougherty (Lighting Design) Vernis Fowler (Costume Design) MALO (Sound Design) Vicki Smith (Scene Design)
<b>Dates:</b>	Previews (with talk back), April 12 & 13 at 7:30 pm <b>Opening Night, Friday April 14 at 8:00 pm</b> (talk back) April 14 through May 7, 2006 (run) May 7 (closing)
<b>Performances:</b>	Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. Fridays at 8:00 pm Saturdays at 2:00 and 8:00 pm Sundays at 2:00 and 7:30 pm
<b>Tickets:</b>	\$32 Discounts available for previews, students, seniors & groups Box Office: 651-224-3180 or <a href="http://www.penumbrateatre.org">www.penumbrateatre.org</a>
<b>Theatre Location:</b>	Penumbra Theatre 270 North Kent Street Saint Paul, MN 55102
<b>Media Contact:</b>	Julie McGarvie, Director of Marketing <a href="mailto:julie.mcgarvie@penumbrateatre.org">julie.mcgarvie@penumbrateatre.org</a> 651-290-8686 x250

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**Artist's bios:**

**LOU BELLAMY** (Producer & Director) is Founder and Artistic Director of Penumbra Theatre Company. He graduated with a BA from Minnesota State University, Mankato, and received his MA from the University of Minnesota. 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. Among the awards he has received for excellence in arts and education are the W. Harry Davis Foundation Award for Leadership in Afro-centric Education, the Links Award in Recognition of Excellence in Black Theatre, and a doctorate from Hamline University. Some of Bellamy's directing credits include: *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*, *Reflections of Black Nativity*, *Dinah Was*, *On the Open Road*, *King Hedley II*, *Someplace Soft to Fall*, *A Lovesong for Miss Lydia*, *Louie & Ophelia*, *Riffs*, *Black Eagles*, *The Darker Face of the Earth*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, *Seven Guitars*, *Big White Fog*, *Two Trains Running*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Soul Man Dead*, *Coming the Hurricane*, *Three Ways Home*, *Buffalo Hair*, *King of Coons*, *The Mighty Gents*, *Little Tommy Parker's Celebrated Colored Minstrel Show*, *The African American Company Presents Richard III*, *Harvest the Forest*, *Shorteyes*, and *Soul Alley*. His acting credits include lead roles in *Fences*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Waiting in Vain*, and *Talking Bones*.

**JAMES CRAVEN** (Rueben Tate) is a 2005 recipient of the Spenser Cherashore Fund. James used his grant to research Native American culture and the experiences of the Buffalo Soldiers circa 1880's in the greater southwestern United States. Last season he performed the role of Craig Robe in *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers* in the Penumbra Theatre/ Trinity Rep Theater production and subsequent national tour of the William S. Yellow Robe Jr. play. He also performed last season in Penumbra's production of *Stage Directions*, and in the role of Hambone in the Kansas City Rep Theater production of *Two Trains Runnin*. Most recently, he appeared in *The Trial of Osama Bin Laden* at Old Arizona Theater, directed by John Donahue.

**TISCH JONES** (Grace Georges) is a professional director and educator whose work has been nationally recognized. Most recently in the Twin Cities she directed *Las Meninas* at the University of Minnesota and *Rollin' on the T.O.B.A.* at Penumbra. Acting is something that she loves, but rarely has the opportunity to do. Her most recent work as an actress is her autobiographical one-woman production of *Crone*, at the Emma Goldman Clinic in Iowa City, and Rosa in Pearl Cleages' *Bourbon on the Border* at Iowa Summer Repertory.

**NATHANIEL NDOZI** (Russell Adams) This is Nate's debut on the professional stage. He has previously performed in several Breck School theatre productions, including *Oklahoma*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Into The Woods*, and *Twelfth Night*.

**FAYE M. PRICE** (Rachel Tate) is pleased to return to Penumbra Theatre, where she originated the role of Rachel in the 1982-83 production of *Zooman and the Sign*. Other Penumbra credits include the company's inaugural production, *Eden*, in 1977, *The African Company Presents Richard III* in 1987-88 and *Jar the Floor* in 1997-98. Recent

credits include Tracey Scott Wilson's *The Story*, Daniel Alexander Jones' *Bel Canto* and Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* at Pillsbury House Theatre, where she also serves as Co-Artistic Producing Director. Other credits include The Women's Theater Project and Productions, Hudson Guild Theater, Circle In The Square, Guthrie Theater, Baltimore Center Stage, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Mixed Blood and Eye of the Storm. A production dramaturge for more than a dozen productions at the Guthrie, Penumbra, and the History Theater, Faye was awarded the August Wilson Fellowship for Dramaturgy and Literary Criticism, and received her graduate degree from the University of Minnesota.

**T. MYCHAEL RAMBO** (Emmett Tate) is an actor, vocalist, and educator. Mychael has performed at Penumbra since 1989, and has been seen in *Tambourines to Glory*, *Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope*, *Spunk*, *Last Minstrel Show*, *Jitney*, and several performances of *Black Nativity*. He has also performed with Guthrie Theatre, Illusion Theatre, 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, 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.

**EVAN SALONE** (Victor Tate) This is Evan's first show at Penumbra Theatre. He has previously participated in summer programs at the Children's Theatre Company and performed in their productions of *Mississippi Panorama* and *The Beggars' Strike*. Evan has also performed in the Breck School theatre productions of *Oklahoma* and *The Three Penny Opera*.

**AUSTENE VAN** (Ash Boswell) is a Penumbra Theatre Company member. Select Penumbra credits include *Dinah Was*, *The Trial*, and *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, *Two Queens One Castle*, *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.

**KEVIN D. WEST** (Donald Jackson) is a Penumbra Theatre Company member. His acting credits include *Two Trains Running*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Someplace Soft to Fall*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Seven Guitars* and *Freefall*. Kevin's most recent Twin Cities appearance was in *A Raisin in the Sun* with Alchemy Theater in which he played Walter Lee. Other credits include *The Story* at Pillsbury House Theater, *The Dance on*

*Widows Row, Bill of (W) Rights* and *CutFlowers* with Mixed Blood Theater, *The Meeting* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* at The Great American History Theater, and *The Death of Bessie Smith* with Theater Latte` Da. Nationally, Kevin has appeared in Los Angeles, Chicago, St. Louis, Orlando and Indianapolis. Film and TV credits: The NAACP Image Award nominated *Justice*, the soon to be released *Sweet Caroline, The Death of Tommy Grimes, Bill's Gun Shop* and *Kingdom Hospital*.

**AHANTI YOUNG** (Zooman) is an actor, percussionist, and spoken word artist. His professional theater experiences date back to the early 1990's, where he made his debut on the Penumbra Theatre stage in the production of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* as a company member. Ahanti has been seen in several Penumbra production's since, including *The Day The Bronx Died, Geneva Cottrell - waiting for the dog to die, Jitney, Black Eagles, Darker Face of The Earth*, and most recently, *Two Trains Running*. Other venues include Alchemy Theater, African American Heritage Ensemble (international), Ten Thousand Things Theater, The Great American History Theater, Sirius B Artist Collective and The Guthrie Theatre. More recent ventures have led Ahanti to Musical/Theatrical/Poetic artist collective, Edupoetic Enterbrainment (EPE) and Critical Interdisciplinary Collaborative, In The Belly. Ahanti is also a freelance instructor and has several affiliations with schools, programs and community centers throughout Minnesota.

**MARK DOUGHERTY** (Light Design) has been the Lighting Supervisor and Facilities Manager at Penumbra Theatre for the past five years. Penumbra designs include: *On the Open Road, Joe Turner's Come and Gone, Two Trains Running, King Hedley II, Dinah Was, and Slippery When Wet*. He works as an Electrician at the Guthrie Theatre and The Children's Theatre. Mark 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.

**VERNIS R. FOWLER** (Costume Designer) has worked with Penumbra Theatre Company on a number of productions as costume designer. Her credits include *Stage Directions, Reflections of Black Nativity, A Love Song for Miss Lydia, Indigo Blues, Freefall, Flyin' West, Spunk* and two productions of *Jar the Floor*. Other costuming credits include Dennis Spears' *Sentimental Reasons* at Hey City Stage; J.D. Steele's and Pop Staples' *Something New for the Holidays*, The Steele Family's *This Must Be Christmas* and the Minneapolis Gospel Sound's *Bloom into Spring* at the Cricket Theater. Ms. Fowler also assisted in the production of *Mahalia* at the Old Log Theatre.

**MALO** (Sound Design) A music veteran since his teens, Malo is the spiritual and creative force behind the critically acclaimed group Tribe of Millions. The band has played to packed houses across the country, won several awards, and were featured artists on VH-1. Malo has also played with Me'Shell Ndegeocello, The Black Crows, Soul Asylum, Chaka Khan, and has worked with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. In addition to performing, Malo has also scored films including *Street Guns* and *The Visionary*, and commercials for Target Market, Target, Marshall Field's, Mervyn's, African American Adoption Agency, and Dunwoody Institute. Theater work includes Djola Branner's *Mighty Real, A Slow Ride on the Big Muddy, Straight as a Line* at the

Hennepin Center for Performing Arts, *Dinah Was*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Two Trains Running*, *Seven Guitars*, and *King Hedley II* at Penumbra Theatre.

**VICKI SMITH** (Set Design) This is Vicki's first production for Penumbra. In the last two seasons, she has worked with Lou Bellamy at Kansas City Repertory Theatre designing *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Two Trains Running*. She has worked for theatres around the country including 35 productions for Denver Center Theatre Company (1998 Tony award winner), Cleveland Playhouse, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Arizona Theatre Company, Cincinnati Playhouse-in-the-Park, The Children's Theatre Company, Minnesota Opera, Anchorage Opera, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Portland Center Stage, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, A Contemporary Theatre (Seattle), Alley Theatre (Houston), Seattle Repertory Theatre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, and San Jose Repertory Theatre. She was associate set designer at the American Conservatory Theatre (San Francisco) from 1980-83. She received her training from the University of Washington where she received MFA's in both technical theatre and sculpture.