

NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE

For Immediate Release

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Word(s)PLAY! 2011

New Play Festival at Penumbra

Supported by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

July 12, 2011; St. Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, Minnesota's only African American theatre, proudly announced today the third annual *Word(s)PLAY!*, a forum designed to develop new plays by African American playwrights. *Word(s)PLAY!* will introduce three new plays to the Twin Cities **July 16, 23, & August 6, 2011 at 7:30 PM.**

This three day event will offer a staged reading of each play followed by an open talk back with the playwright, director, artists and audience. This year's lineup includes *Journey to the Door of No Return* by Psalmayene 24, *Sweet Maladies* by Zakiyyah Alexander, and *Tell Martha Not to Moan* by Clinnesha Sibley.

Word(s)PLAY!

July 16, 7:30 PM: *Journey to the Door of No Return* by Psalmayene 24
Directed by Dominic Taylor

July 23, 7:30 PM: *Sweet Maladies* by Zakiyyah Alexander
Directed by Dominic Taylor

August 6, 7:30 PM: *Tell Martha Not to Moan* by Clinnesha Sibley
Directed by Dominic Taylor

The plays will be read by a company of professional actors that includes: Ansa Akyea, Charla Marice Bailey, Christian Bardin, Darrien Ellis Burks, Sun Mee Chomet, Shaun Hamilton, Andrea Ivey, Celeste Jones, George Keller, Sanyu Lubogo, Nora Montanez, Greta Oglesby, Aaron Preusse, James Williams, and Bruce A. Young.

Reservations can be made through the Penumbra Theatre Box Office: 651-224-3180 or online at www.penumbratheatre.org. The event is free and open to the public.

Penumbra's associate artistic director and curator of *Word(s)PLAY!*, Dominic Taylor said, "The ultimate goal of the new play program is to move a play onto the main stage. We have proudly witnessed plays from the past two *Word(s)PLAY!* festivals receive further production around the country. And, the Penumbra 2011-2012 season includes the

much anticipated *Julius by Design* by Kara Lee Corthorn, the first of these plays to be produced on Penumbra's main stage."

When Penumbra launched *Word(s)PLAY!* in 2008, Sydné Mahone was the dramaturge. An associate professor of playwriting and dramatic literature at the University of Iowa, and an established scholar and author, she shared this assessment:

"This is the first major black play development project of the 21st century. It now holds the position of standard bearer, due to the caliber of the playwrights and complexity of the works. This distinguishing mark is a result of the status and reputation of Penumbra, the leadership of Dominic Taylor, and the professionalism of the presentations. The program shows the potential to join the elite play development programs such as Sundance Institute Theatre Lab and the Eugene O'Neill National Playwrights Conference. Unlike these flagship programs, Penumbra has the unique ability to fulfill the promise of play development with the production of new black plays. To illustrate the artistic impact of this program, Marcus Gardley (Yale 2004, Sundance 2005) remarked that it was his first experience at a black theater, that it was fulfilling, revealing and would have a long-lasting impression. It is imperative that our finest writers are at our finest black theaters."

PLAY DESCRIPTIONS

Journey to the Door of No Return by Psalmayene 24

A struggling music producer and an eccentric novelist meet at a bus stop—a crossroads where they face the demons inside. A mystical tale that explores the process of forgiveness and the cost of redemption.

Sweet Maladies by Zakiyyah Alexander

Three recently freed slave girls, stuck in 'the big house', play the only game they know: history. But what happens when the game turns sticky sweet and deadly?

Tell Martha Not to Moan by Clinnesha Sibley

Inside an African American home, Detroit, 2007—the nation is embroiled in the presidential campaign. A glimpse into the changing world through the eyes and memories of a devoted and desolate elderly couple.

*****MORE*****

BIOS

Psalmayene 24 (Playwright) is an actor, playwright and director. He has received playwriting commissions from The African Continuum Theater Company, Arena Stage and Imagination Stage. His one man play, *Free Jujube Brown!*, is published in the anthology *Playz from the Boom-Box Galaxy: Theater from the Hip-Hop Generation* (TCG). He has appeared on HBO's critically acclaimed series *The Wire* and is the writer/director of the award-winning play for young audiences *Zomo the Rabbit: A Hip-Hop Creation Myth*. He is currently working on an adaptation of Pinocchio that will have its world premiere production at Imagination Stage in Maryland during their 2011-2012 season.

Zakiyyah Alexander (Playwright) is a writer and actor. She is the author of: *10 Things to do before I die* (Second Stage Uptown), *Sick?* (Summer Play Festival), *The Etymology of Bird* (Hip Hop Theater Festival, Providence Black Repertory Theatre), *Blurring Shine* (Market Theater, Johannesburg), *Sweet Maladies* (Rucker Theatre), *Something New, You Are Here*, and *The Focus*. She is currently working on a musical with Imani Uzuri, featuring the poetry of Sonia Sanchez and the play *black Picasso*. Ms. Alexander is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama. She is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor at Bard College where she teaches undergraduate playwriting.

Clinnesha D. Sibley (Playwright) is a published poet and Assistant Professor in Drama at the University of Arkansas--Fayetteville. Her plays have been selected by the Arkansas Repertory Theatre's Voices at the River Playwriting Residency, Theatre Squared's Arkansas New Play Fest, and the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Her plays have also been selected by the Great Plains Theatre Conference as a part of the 2008 PlayLabs and for the 2011 Main Stage Series. She is the recipient of the 2009 Key Woman Educator in Drama Award from the Iota Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma Society and the 2011 Holland New Voices Award.

Dominic Taylor (Director) is the associate artistic director of Penumbra Theatre, head of Penumbra's OKRA New Play Development Program, and an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota. Select directing credits: *Black Nativity: A Season for Change* at Penumbra, *Fresh Faust* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, *The Negroes Burial Ground* at the Kitchen, N.Y.C., and *Uppa Creek* at Dixon Place. His published plays include *Wedding Dance*, *Personal History* and *UpCity Service(s)*. Mr. Taylor has also worked with Crossroads Theatre, Rites and Reasons Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, The Public Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, Playwrights Horizons, and Ensemble Studio Theatre.

Penumbra Theatre was founded in 1976 by Lou Bellamy to make socially responsible art – art that demanded a response, art with intent, art that could create change. At a time when roles for black artists were limited to stereotypes and comical representations, Penumbra produced theater that roared with authenticity through the unrestrained and rich voice of black artists and playwrights. This respect for cultural authenticity became Penumbra's signature style – and demand for it has reached new heights from theatres

around the country fostering collaborations, new productions, tours and awards. For the latest news and updates, visit www.penumbrateatre.org.

OKRA, the Penumbra Theatre new play program was launched in 2008-- a rigorous culturally specific program where playwrights can develop their plays in a safe, nurturing environment without restriction or reservation. The program has three components dedicated to play development – the expansion of early ideas, the exploration of a play script, and a developmental workshop to share the script with an audience. The ultimate goal of OKRA is to move a new play onto the main stage. Each year, we conduct Word(s)Play!, an intense development workshop for playwrights to refine completed scripts with the help of actors, directors, designers and musicians – readying it for full production. Penumbra has nurtured three plays that have received further production opportunities at New York Theatre Workshop and LAByrinth Theatre Company in New York City; Providence Black Rep in Providence, Rhode Island; and American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, California. Word(s)Play! has quickly gained critical acclaim within the industry for the caliber of the playwrights involved and the complexity of the works selected. The program receives generous support from the Jerome Foundation.

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