

NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE

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Penumbra Theatre Announces Casting for *Two Trains Running*

By August Wilson

Directed by Lou Bellamy

Presented by Cargill

On Stage September 29-October 30, 2011

September 8, 2011; St. Paul, Minn. – Penumbra Theatre Company, one of the nation’s preeminent African American theatres, announces a powerhouse cast for its production of August Wilson’s *Two Trains Running* directed by Lou Bellamy. *Two Trains Running* opens on the Penumbra stage September 29 and runs through October 30, 2011. Previews are September 27 & 28.

The cast features James T. Alfred as Sterling, James Craven as Memphis, Crystal Fox as Risa, Abdul Salaam El Razzac as Holloway, Dennis W. Spears as West, Kevin D. West as Wolf and Ahanti Young as Hambone.

Penumbra has produced more of August Wilson’s plays than any other theatre in the world and has earned the reputation of being a definitive interpreter of his work. Wilson honed his craft alongside fellow Penumbra Company members, which contributes to the intimate and vital quality of the Wilson plays staged at Penumbra. In a 1996 speech, August Wilson said “[Penumbra’s] production of *The Piano Lesson* would become not only my favorite staging but a model of style and eloquence that would inspire my future work.”

With the generous support of Cargill, Penumbra proudly presents *Two Trains Running* as part of its commitment to stage all ten of August Wilson’s plays that chronicle black American life decade by decade. In 2007, Penumbra launched the cycle with *The Piano Lesson* and *Gem of the Ocean*. In 2008, the critically acclaimed *Fences* was produced, followed by *Radio Golf* in 2009 and *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* in 2010. *Two Trains Running* opens the 2011-2012 season, Penumbra’s 35th anniversary.

Two Trains Running is an inspiring story about the protest that changed a nation. It’s 1969 and the Hill District is gentrifying, threatening the cultural heart of black Pittsburgh. Slated for demolition is Memphis’ diner, the last refuge for a makeshift family of wounded souls who have all but given up. It takes a newcomer, Sterling—a young convict with a heart that lives up to his name—to change the rules of the game. Unknowingly, the regulars take up a fight that carries them headlong into the Civil Rights Movement.

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Bellamy said he selected this play for Penumbra's 35th Anniversary Season because the sense of ritual and community are most accessible in this piece – two important themes in Penumbra's history as well. “In *Two Trains Running*, it's the routines and activities of daily living that knit the community together. And in these seemingly small and nuanced practices, Wilson is able to elevate the everyday experience of black Americans in the conduct of their lives to epic proportion,” said Bellamy. “It's those same core values that continue to propel Penumbra to present work that authentically reflects African American experiences.”

The artistic team for *Two Trains Running* also includes Martin Gwinup (Sound Designer), Michelle Habeck (Lighting Designer), Mathew J. LeFebvre (Costume Designer), Carra Martinez (Dramaturg/August Wilson Fellow), Amy Reddy (Prop Master), Vicki Smith (Scenic Designer) and Mary K. Winchell (Stage Manager).

Season Presenters: Star Tribune, Minnesota Monthly, Minnesota Public Radio and Comcast

Penumbra Overview

In 1976, as a reaction to the stereotypical depiction of the black ethos, Lou Bellamy founded Penumbra to make art that roared with authenticity through the rich, unrestrained voice of black playwrights and artists. As Minnesota's only professional African American theater, Penumbra has achieved national recognition for its artistic excellence and signature style and has presented 155 productions including 35 world premieres. It contributes over \$2 million annually to the local economy, and attracts new talent and media attention from across the country.

The ultimate goal of the Penumbra mission is to make socially responsible art that provokes thought and action around issues of racism and social justice. Penumbra activates its mission through three core programs: the main stage brings artistically excellent stories to life with an unflinching commitment to cultural authenticity; our new play program ensures that the African American experience is preserved by developing uncompromising stories; and, our education programs mobilize the power of art to create social change.

Bellamy continues to earn recognition for his work. Most recent awards include the 2009 Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs Award for Public Leadership; the 2009 induction into The College of Fellows of the American Theatre; 2007 Obie for Best Direction of *Two Trains Running* at the Signature Theatre; the 2007 National Black Theatre Festival Lloyd Richards Award for Directing; and the 2006 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award.

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QUICK REFERENCE

Production: *Two Trains Running*
Playwright: August Wilson
Producer: Penumbra Theatre Company and Lou Bellamy
Presenter: Cargill
Director: Lou Bellamy
Stage Manager: Mary K. Winchell

Cast: **James T. Alfred*** (Sterling), **James Craven*** (Memphis), **Crystal Fox*** (Risa), **Abdul Salaam El Razzac*** (Holloway), **Dennis Spears*** (West), **Kevin West*** (Wolf), and **Ahanti Young*** (Hambone).

*Member of Actors' Equity

Design Team: Vickie Smith (Scenic Designer),
Michelle Habeck (Lighting Designer),
Martin Gwinup (Sound Designer),
Mathew J. LeFebvre (Costume Designer),
Amy Reddy (Props Master)

Dates: September 29-October 30, 2011
Previews September 27 & 28 at 7:30pm
Opening Night-Thursday, September 29 at 7:30pm

Performances: **Wednesdays through Sundays at 7:30pm**
Sunday matinees at 2:00pm

Tickets: 651-224-3180 or penumbratheatre.org

Price: Adult single \$40; Students \$10

Theatre Location: 270 North Kent Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102

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The Twentieth Century Cycle by August Wilson

1900s - <i>Gem of the Ocean</i>	1950s - <i>Fences</i>
1910s - <i>Joe Turner's Come and Gone</i>	1960s - <i>Two Trains Running</i>
1920s - <i>Ma Rainey's Black Bottom</i>	1970s - <i>Jitney</i>
1930s - <i>The Piano Lesson</i>	1980s - <i>King Hedley II</i>
1940s - <i>Seven Guitars</i>	1990s - <i>Radio Golf</i>

Season Presenters: Star Tribune, Minnesota Monthly, Minnesota Public Radio and Comcast

ARTISTS' BIOS NEXT PAGE

LOU BELLAMY (Director) is the Founder and Artistic Director of Penumbra Theatre, an OBIE Award-winning stage director, and has taught for 35 years as an associate professor at the University of Minnesota. Select Penumbra credits: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Two Old Black Guys Just Sitting Around Talking*, *Black Pearl Sings!*, *Radio Golf*, *Fences*, *The Piano Lesson*, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Gem of the Ocean*. Other credits: ***Two Trains Running*** at the Signature Theatre Company in New York, *Jitney* at Kansas City Repertory Theatre and Arizona Theatre Company and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* at The Kennedy Center.

AUGUST WILSON (Playwright) authored *Gem of the Ocean*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Seven Guitars*, *Fences*, ***Two Trains Running***, *Jitney*, *King Hedley II*, and *Radio Golf*. These works explore the heritage and experience of African-Americans, decade-by-decade, over the course of the twentieth century. His plays have been produced at regional theaters across the country and all over the world, as well as on Broadway. In 2003, Mr. Wilson made his professional stage debut in his one-man show, *How I Learned What I Learned*. Mr. Wilson's works garnered many awards including Pulitzer Prizes for *Fences* (1987); and for *The Piano Lesson* (1990); a Tony Award for *Fences*; Great Britain's Olivier Award for *Jitney*; as well as eight New York Drama Critics Circle Awards for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Fences*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, ***Two Trains Running***, *Seven Guitars*, *Jitney*, and *Radio Golf*. Additionally, the cast recording of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* received a 1985 Grammy Award, and Mr. Wilson received a 1995 Emmy Award nomination for his screenplay adaptation of *The Piano Lesson*. Mr. Wilson's early works included the one-act plays *The Janitor*, *Recycle*, *The Coldest Day of the Year*, *Malcolm X*, *The Homecoming* and the musical satire *Black Bart and the Sacred Hills*.

SARAH BELLAMY (Associate Artistic Director – Education) has designed several programs that engage participants in critical thinking, dialogue and action around issues of race and social justice. Select programs include: "RACE Workshop: Meet Your Metaphor," curated to accompany the Science Museum of Minnesota's exhibit *RACE: Are We So Different?* and Penumbra's Summer Institute, a theatre-training program for youth to practice socially responsible art and civic engagement. Ms. Bellamy is currently working toward her doctorate in Comparative Studies and Discourse in Society at the University of Minnesota.

DOMINIC TAYLOR (Associate Artistic Director – New Play Development) is the head of OKRA, the Penumbra 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)*. Other credits: Crossroads Theatre, Rites and Reasons Theatre, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, The Public Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, Playwrights Horizons and Ensemble Studio Theatre.

JAMES T. ALFRED (Sterling) has performed in several Penumbra productions including *Jitney*, *REDSHIRTS*, *Fences* and most recently, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Other select theater credits include *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Kansas City Rep), *The Glass Menagerie* (Steppenwolf), *Alls Well That Ends Well* (Public Theatre), *Romeo and Juliet* (American Repertory Theatre), and *DaDa*, a solo performance written and performed by Mr. Alfred. Film and television credits include "The Line," "Prison Break," *Son of America*, and *One Week*. Mr. Alfred graduated from the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University and holds an M.F.A in acting from the Moscow Art Theatre School.

JAMES CRAVEN (Memphis) is a long-time Penumbra Theatre company member. Select Penumbra credits include *Radio Golf*, *Fences*, *The Piano Lesson*, Penumbra's production of *Gem of the Ocean* presented at the Guthrie Theater, *Get Ready*, *Zooman and the Sign*, *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers* and *REDSHIRTS*, co-produced with Round House Theatre. He also performed at Kansas City Repertory Theater and Arizona Theater Company in their joint production of *Jitney*. James is a 2005 recipient of the Spenser Cherashore Fund, was awarded a 2007 McKnight Fellowship, and received a Lunt-Fontanne Fellowship this year. Mr. Craven has performed two other characters in previous Penumbra productions of *Two Trains Running*: West in 1994 and Hambone in 2002.

CRYSTAL FOX (Risa) most recently performed at Penumbra in *Black Pearl Sings!* Other select theatre credits include *Every Tongue Confess* (Arena Stage), *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* (Portland Center Stage and True Colors Theatre), *Antony & Cleopatra*, *Comedy of Errors* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival). Film and television credits include "In the Heat of the Night," "House of Payne," "Law & Order," "Sopranos," "Old Settler," "Mama Floras' Family," *Once Upon A Time When We Were Colored*, and *Driving Miss Daisy*. Ms. Fox is a recent winner of both Boston's 2009 IRNE (Independent Reviewers of New England) Award and the 2010 Elliot Norton award for Best/Outstanding Actress.

ABDUL SALAAM EL RAZZAC (Holloway) is a founding member of Penumbra Theatre. Recent Penumbra credits include *Radio Golf* and *Gem of the Ocean*. He has also performed at the Willamstown Theatre Festival, Los Angeles Theater Center, A.C.T., Long Wharf, Mark Taper, the Guthrie Theater, South Coast Repertory, Trinity Repertory, Tiffany Theater, The Nate Holden Theater, The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Kansas City Repertory and Arizona Theater Company. He has directed at the Beverly Hills Playhouse, Zephyr, L.A.T.C. and Glaxa Theaters. Awards include the NAACP Image Award, the L.A. Drama Critics Award for performance, the Los Angeles Dramalog Award for best director, and the NAACP Image Award best director nomination. Film and television credits include *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Pretty Woman*, *Glory*, *Malcolm X*, *Terminator II*, *Frasier* and *Conversations with God*.

DENNIS W. SPEARS (West) is a Penumbra Theatre Company member and has performed in *I Wish You Love*, *Black Nativity: Now's the Time*, *Black Nativity: A Season for Change*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Blue* and *Get Ready*. Last season, Mr. Spears embarked on a tour of *Crowns*, a co-production of Indiana Repertory Theatre and Syracuse Stage. No stranger to jazz, Spears has performed nationally and internationally and is an original vocalist with Moore by Four. He has three solo recordings to his credit, is Creative Artistic Director for The Capri Theater and produces a very exciting *Legends* music series.

KEVIN D. WEST (Wolf) is a Penumbra company member. Select Penumbra credits: *I Wish You Love*, *Radio Golf*, *Fences*, *Zooman and the Sign*, *Two Trains Running*, *Some Place Soft to Fall*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Seven Guitars*, *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Freefall*. Other credits: Children's Theatre Company, The Jungle Theater, Mixed Blood Theatre, Pillsbury House Theater, Alchemy Theater, History Theatre, Theater Latté Da, Minnesota Jewish Theater, and Guthrie Theater. Directing: *Fences* at Metropolitan State University and *The Colored Museum* at Minneapolis Community Technical College. Film: "Tommy Grimes," "Sweet Caroline," "Bill's Gun Shop" and "Justice."

Mr. West played the character of Sterling in the Penumbra 2002 production of *Two Trains Running*.

AHANTI YOUNG (Hambone) is an accomplished percussionist, vocalist, spoken word artist, educator and choreographer. His professional theatre experiences date back to the early 1990s, when he made his debut at Penumbra in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. He has been seen in several productions since, including *Two Trains Running*, *Zooman and the Sign*, and *REDSHIRTS*. Other venues include the Guthrie, Ten Thousand Things, the History Theatre, Alchemy Theater (NYC), Round House Theatre (Bethesda, MD) and African American Heritage Ensemble (international), among others. He most recently led a theatre intensive with incarcerated youth at Hennepin County Juvenile Facilities. Mr. Young played the character Wolf in the Penumbra 2002 production of *Two Trains Running*.

MARTIN GWINUP (Sound Designer) has designed several productions for Penumbra including *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*, *REDSHIRTS*, *Fences* and *Black Pearl Sings!* He has been a freelance sound and video designer for over 22 years and has worked locally for Frank Theatre, History Theatre, Children's Theatre Company, Cricket Theatre, Round House Theatre, Trinity Theatre and Eye of the Storm. Mr. Gwinup is an Associate Professor in the Theatre Arts and Dance Department at the University of Minnesota.

MICHELLE HABECK (Lighting Designer) has designed several Penumbra productions including *Gem of the Ocean*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Jitney*, *Radio Golf*, *REDSHIRTS* and *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*. Other select theatre credits include Steppenwolf Theatre Company, The Arden and Baltimore's CenterStage. Ms. Habeck is the recipient of the 2002–2004 NEA/TCG Career Development Program Grant for Design and The University of Texas Co-op Fine Arts Award, 2009. Ms. Habeck is on the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin in the Department of Theatre and Dance.

MATHEW J. LeFEBVRE (Costume Designer) has designed 15 productions for Penumbra including *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Two Old Black Guys Just Sitting Around Talking*, *A Raisin in The Sun*, *Fences*, *Get Ready* and *Gem of the Ocean* (scenery and costumes). Other regional credits include: Guthrie Theater, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, American Players Theatre, Geffen Playhouse, Minnesota Opera, Children's Theatre Company, Cleveland Play House, Trinity Rep, Arizona Theatre Company, The Joyce, The Acting Company, Theatre de la Jeune Lune and Mixed Blood Theatre. Off-Broadway credits include: Signature Theatre, *Two Trains Running* and New York Theatre Workshop, *Bach at Leipzig*.

VICKI SMITH (Scenic Designer) has designed several productions for Penumbra including *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Radio Golf*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Zooman and the Sign*. She has also designed for Denver Center Theatre Company, Children's Theatre Company, Arizona Theatre Company, Kansas City Rep, Seattle Rep, Actors Theatre Louisville, Repertory Theatre St. Louis, Geva Theatre Center, Milwaukee Rep, Dallas Theatre Center, Cincinnati Playhouse, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, and Berkeley Rep. Ms. Smith was selected for the Prague Quadrennial Design Exposition 2007, and she is the recipient of a DramaLogue award, two Bay Area Critic's Awards, and three Denver Critic's Awards.

MARY K. WINCHELL (Stage Manager) is a Penumbra company member. Select Penumbra credits: *I Wish You Love*, *Black Pearl Sings!*, *Radio Golf*, *Gem of the Ocean*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Get Ready*, *Seven Guitars*, *Jitney* and *Two Trains Running*. Other stage management credits: Orpheum Theatre, State Theatre, Pantages Theatre, Children's Theatre Company, The Jungle Theater and the Coconut Grove Playhouse. She served as production stage manager for Macy's

Glamorama, Dorothy Hamill's *Nutcracker on Ice*, Aveda's 20th Anniversary Celebration at Radio City Music Hall and Super Bowl xxvi *Winter Magic*.

CARRA MARTINEZ (Dramaturg/August Wilson Fellow) is the August Wilson Fellow at Penumbra for the second year a row, and is a PhD candidate in Theatre Historiography at the University of Minnesota. Ms. Martinez is also an actor and teacher. Local acting credits include The Playwrights' Center and Teatro del Pueblo. Other theatre credits include the Rude Mechanicals, Salvage Vanguard Theater, the dirigo group, Austin Script Works, Hyde Park Theatre, Refraction Arts Project, the Fusebox Festival and the University of Texas at Austin.

AMY REDDY (Prop Master) has worked at several theatres as wardrobe supervisor, assistant head of props, running crew and props run crew. Select credits include Children's Theatre Company, Mixed Blood, Sleepy Hollow Theatre and Arts Park, and the Santa Fe Opera.

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