

## NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE

*For Immediate Release*

August 30, 2007

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### ***REDSHIRTS***

#### **World Premiere**

**Presented by Lou Bellamy, Penumbra and Round House Theatre**

August 30, 2007; St. Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, the nation's preeminent African American theatre, proudly announces the opening of ***REDSHIRTS*** written by Dana Yeaton, directed by Lou Bellamy, September 6, 2007. The production will run **September 6 through September 30, 2007.**

This production marks the world premiere of the play, a Penumbra co-production with Round House Theatre, Bethesda, Maryland. The show will open Penumbra's 31<sup>st</sup> season and then travels to open the season at Round House. The play's evolution over the last three years has included a staged reading by the Sight Unseen Theatre Company of California, and a live performance of excerpts by the football players whose voices and experiences helped to shape the piece at the University of Tennessee.

"Penumbra makes theatre that matters. And it takes risks that are actually risky. When we set out to premiere Dana Yeaton's new play, we needed a partner to bring authenticity and perspective to the table. Our partnership with Lou Bellamy and Penumbra Theatre does that. As producers, it makes us more collaborative. As artists, it makes us more inquisitive and daring," stated Blake Robison, Producing Artistic Director of Round House Theatre.

In ***REDSHIRTS***, playwright Dana Yeaton explores a sports scandal involving college football players, delving into the complex social factors that often contribute to controversial and even condemnable behavior of athletes. The play follows the story of eighteen-year-old Dante Greene, an all-star rookie in the Tennessee Southern stable. Dante is an impressive athlete but a vulnerable student. Impatient for his time on the field, he cuts every corner he can. His climb to the top is stopped short when an English professor accuses him of plagiarism, an expulsive offense. Caught between crippling insecurity and a powerful sense of entitlement for his due, Dante realizes there are no cutting corners in this, the fight of his life. Along with Dante, his coach, English professor, tutor, and his three teammates all have a burden to bear, a difficult ethical decision to weigh. Is an undergraduate athlete's highest loyalty to his own playing time, the pursuit of a degree, or his teammates? What should a coach do when he faces losing his best new talent? Should a college professor overlook potential wrongdoing because of the fallout it will cause?

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Layers of antagonism—between academics and athletics, black and white, male and female, adult and student complicate each encounter, each relationship as *REDSHIRTS* tackles the conflict between commercial success and intellectual integrity.

The ensemble cast includes Penumbra company members and newcomers to the Twin Cities: James T. Alfred (Dante Greene), James Craven (Coach Tyrell Moore), Kimberly Gilbert (Tori), Cedric Mays (Jahzeel Wilson), Will Sallee (Dale Mayo), Kimberly Schraf (Dr. Audrey Yantz), Regina Marie Williams (Dr. Charlene Bigelow), and Ahanti Young, (Curtis Combs).

### **ARTISTS' BIOS:**

**JAMES T. ALFRED** (Dante Green) is proud to make his Penumbra debut. His most recent appearances include the Kansas City Repertory Theatre/Arizona Theatre Company co-production of August Wilson's *Jitney*, directed by Lou Bellamy; *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Three Sisters* at the American Repertory Theatre. Film and television credits include the critically acclaimed independent film *One Week*, and Twentieth Century Fox's smash hit television drama *Prison Break*. James is a graduate of the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University.

**JAMES CRAVEN** (Coach Tyrell Moore) is a long time Penumbra company member. Recent Penumbra credits include *Get Ready*, *Zooman and the Sign*, and *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*. He also recently performed at Kansas City Rep Theater and Arizona Theater Company in their joint production of *Jitney*. James is a 2005 recipient of the Spenser Cherashore Fund. He used this grant to research Native American culture and the experiences of the Buffalo Soldiers circa 1880's in the greater southwestern United States. This research provided invaluable knowledge that James applied to the creation of his role of Craig Robe in *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers* in the Penumbra Theatre/ Trinity Rep Theater production.

**KIMBERLY GILBERT** (Tori) hails from Washington D.C., and this performance marks her Twin Cities debut. In D.C., she has performed in *Nutshell* in the Capital Fringe Festival, *Cardenio Found* with Taffety Punk Theatre Company, and *Martha, Josie and the Chinese Elvis* with Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. She received the 2007 Helen Hayes Nomination - Lead Actress for her role as "Brenda-Marie" in *Martha, Josie and the Chinese Elvis*. Kimberly is a company member with Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company Member. She is also a company member with Taffety Punk Theatre Company. She received an MFA at the Academy for Classical Acting with the Shakespeare Theatre Company at George Washington University.

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**CEDRIC MAYS** (Jahzeel Wilson) is very pleased to make his first appearance at Penumbra Theatre Company. Most recently, Cedric starred in *Blue/Orange* as Christopher, directed by Jeremy Skidmore, and *Insurrection: Holding History as T.J.*, directed by Timothy Douglas, both at Theater Alliance in Washington, D.C.

**WILL SALLEE** (Dale Mayo) is making his Penumbra Theatre Company debut in *REDSHIRTS*. A graduate from Hamline University in St. Paul, he performed in several main stage productions there including *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Into the Woods*, and *Until Someone Wakes Up*.

**KIMBERLY SCHRAF** (Dr. Audrey Yantz) welcomes this opportunity to collaborate with Penumbra Theatre and take in St. Paul at the same time. At home, in Washington, D.C., she has been a proud member of that vibrant theatre community for over twenty years. Her most recent productions have been *Going to St. Ives* at Everyman Theatre, Baltimore; *A Prayer for Owen Meany* at Round House Theatre, Bethesda; and productions of *Frozen* and *Crestfall* at The Studio Theatre. In addition, she has worked at Woolly Mammoth Theatre, Arena Stage, Ford's Theatre, the Kennedy Center, and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Television appearances include *Homicide: Life on the Streets*. She narrates books on tape and is a graduate of St. John's College, Annapolis.

**REGINA MARIE WILLIAMS** (Dr. Charlene Bigelow) most recently performed in *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill* at The Milwaukee Rep's Stackner. She has performed at the Guthrie in *The Falls*, *The Peoples Temple*, *She Loves Me*, *Oedipus*, *Crowns* and *Yellowman*, a Guthrie/Mixed Blood Theater co-production, directed by Marion McClinton. Productions at Mixed Blood include *Two Queens One Castle* and *The Dance on Widow's Row*. As a company member of Penumbra Theatre, she has been seen in *Seven Guitars*, *Two Trains*, *Love Song for Ms Lydia*, *Louie and Ophelia* and more. Her performance as Dinah in Penumbra's *Dinah Was* prompted her to record "Regina is...the songs of Dinah Washington," produced by Sanford Moore of Moore by Four. Her most recent CD, "Feel the Spirit," was co-produced with Gary Hines of the Grammy Award – winning Sounds of Blackness of which she is a former member. Regina is a McKnight Theater Artist of the Year 2006-2007.

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**AHANTI YOUNG** (Curtis Combs) 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*, *Two Trains Running* and most recently *Zooman and the Sign*. 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 Theater. 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.

**LOU BELLAMY** (Director) is Founder and Artistic Director of Penumbra Theatre Company. He has been a member of the University of Minnesota's faculty for 30 years and is currently appointed to the rank of Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance. Awards include the 2007 OBIE for Direction, 2007 Lloyd Richards' Directing Award, the Lucille Lortel for Outstanding Revival in 2007, the 2006 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award, the 2005 Ivey Lifetime Achievement Award, the W. Harry Davis Foundation Award for Leadership in Afro-centric Education, Links Award in Recognition of Excellence in Black Theatre, and a doctorate from Hamline University. Recent directing credits include *Two Trains Running* at the Signature Theatre in New York, *Jitney* at Kansas City Repertory Theatre and Arizona Theatre Company. Recent directing credits at Penumbra include *Get Ready*, *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*, *Zooman and the Sign*, and *Black Nativity--A Homecoming*. Acting credits include lead roles in *Fences*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Waiting in Vain*, and *Talking Bones*.

**DOMINIC TAYLOR** (Associate Artistic Director) has been a New York based practicing theatre artist for the past 20 years, who has recently relocated to Saint Paul. Most recently, he directed the developmental workshop of *Space* by Keli Garrett with the LABYrinth Theatre Company. He has directed a variety of theatre projects and musicals including the new opera *Fresh Faust* (librettist Greg Tate, composer Leroy Jenkins) at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and the cantata *The Negro Burial Ground* (librettist Ann Greene, composer Leroy Jenkins) at The Kitchen in New York City. He has worked with Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, The Public Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, Crossroads Theater, Rites and Reasons Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Ensemble Studio Theatre among others. He holds both a Bachelors and a Master of Fine Arts Degree from Brown University. He has been appointed Assistant Professor in Directing at the University of Minnesota.

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**DANA YEATON** (Playwright) is the recipient of the “New Voice in American Theatre” award from the William Inge Theatre Festival. His short play *Helen At Risk* won the Heideman Award from the Actor’s Theatre of Louisville and his full-length drama *Mad River Rising* received the Moss Hart Award. For ten years he was playwright-in-residence at Vermont Stage Company, which produced his original plays *JUMP CUT*, *Mad River Rising* and *The Big Random*. They also premiered his adaptation of *Midwives*, Chris Bohjalian's *New York Times* best-selling novel. Yeaton’s adaptation of *Midwives* has been produced in North Carolina, Arizona, Tennessee, New Hampshire, and, most recently, at Round House Theatre, in Bethesda, MD. He was founding director of Vermont Young Playwrights Project, and of the Addison Repertory Theatre, a full-day, vocational theatre program for high school students. Dana lives with his wife, Frankie, in Vermont and teaches at Middlebury College.

**RONALD ALOIS SCHULTZ** (Stage Manager) has been working as an actor, stage manager, production assistant, and sound board operator in the Twin Cities since 1992. A company member of Penumbra Theatre, Ron has worked on over 60 productions at Penumbra including *Jitney*, *Stage Directions*, and the 2006 production of *Ain’t Misbehavin’*. He has also worked on productions at Mixed Blood, Illusion, Eye of the Storm, Fitzgerald, Pantages, Frank, and Alchemy theatres. Ron was the company manager of Pillsbury House Theatre’s touring production *Breaking Ice* in 2003 and 2004 and was the assistant stage manager for the Carlson Honors 2005 Awards for the Carlson Company at the State Theatre. He provided technical support for Roxanne Wallace’s *Evolution of a Soul Sista* at Patrick’s Cabaret and designed the set for *Riff Raff* at Pillsbury House (2006). Ron is currently pursuing his B.A. in Social Science and his Secondary Teacher Licensure at Metropolitan State University.

**C. LANCE BROCKMAN** (Scenic Design) is a professor of theatre design at the University of Minnesota where he has been on the faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance for 34 years. His research interest is in the historic methods of scenic art used to create illusionary background for opera houses, vaudeville, circuses, and fraternal initiations. His efforts led to the discovery and subsequent exhibits titled: *The Twin City Scenic Collection: Popular Entertainment 1895-1929* and *Theatre of the Fraternity: Staging the Ritual Space of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry 1896-1929*. Both exhibits and national tours were supported by grants from the National Endowment of the Humanities. In addition, Lance nationally provides master classes and workshops on historical painting techniques and maintains an active design career. Brockman is a member of the United States Institute for Theatre Technology—a professional organization that represents 3500 designer and technicians from North America.

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**MARTIN GWINUP** (Sound Design) is an associate professor in the Theatre Arts and Dance Department at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. He teaches Audio and Video technology, design and production. He has also worked in the Twin Cities area as a freelance sound/video designer and technician for the past 18 years. He has worked for companies such as the Frank Theatre, History Theatre, Children's Theatre, Cricket Theatre, and Eye of the Storm, to name a few. *REDSHIRTS* will be his twelfth production with Penumbra Theatre Company. Recent design at Penumbra include, *Blue, Black Nativity—A Celebration of Family, A Celebration for the Soul... Testify!*, *Rollin on the T.O.B.A.*, and *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*.

**MICHELLE HABECK** (Lighting Designer) has several collaborations with Lou Bellamy including *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Two Trains Running* and *Jitney* at Kansas City Rep. Recent national credits include *Love Song* at Steppenwolf Theatre, *Carter's Way* at Kansas City Rep, *Things of Dry Hours* and *Elimina's Kitchen* at Center Stage, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf* at Alliance Theatre Company, and *Lobby Hero* at the Goodman Theatre. She has worked as associate lighting designer with Tony awarded designer Donald Holder on *Gem of the Ocean*, *King Hedley II*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Boy From Oz*, *Movin' Out* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. Michelle is a National Endowment for the Arts/TCG Grant winner for 2003-04. She holds an M.F.A. in design from Northwestern University. Michelle is faculty at The University of Texas Austin.

**MATHEW J. LEFEBVRE** (Costume Design) has designed several productions for Penumbra including *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*, *On the Open Road*, *Black Eagles*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, and *Jitney*. Off Broadway designs include *Two Trains Running* at Signature Theatre and *Bach at Leipzig* at New York Theatre Workshop. Set designs include *Anytown* and *Notes from a Séance* for Shapiro and Smith Dance Company at the Joyce Theatre. He has designed the costumes for fifteen productions at the Guthrie Theatre including *She Loves Me*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wintertime*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, and *School for Scandal*. Other regional credits include *Tartuffe*, *A Flea in Her Ear*, *Bach at Leipzig* at Milwaukee Rep, *Jitney*, *Raisin In The Sun*, and *Two Trains Running* at The Kansas City Rep. He has also designed for Arizona Theatre Company, Trinity Rep, Theatre de la Jeune Lune, Geffen Playhouse, and American Players Theatre.

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## **PENUMBRA THEATRE**

Penumbra 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. On the national tour of *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*, co-produced with Trinity Repertory Theatre, Penumbra had the great fortune to perform at Round House Theatre as the show traveled the Mid-Atlantic coast. Recognizing the power of new work to engage audiences in topical dialogue and for collaborative efforts to expand the reach to wider audiences, Penumbra and Round House seized the opportunity to co-produce the world premiere of *REDSHIRTS*. The production will play at Penumbra and then travel to Round House in Bethesda, Maryland. This season, Lou and Penumbra will also journey to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota. For the latest news and updates, visit [www.penumbra.org](http://www.penumbra.org).

## **ROUND HOUSE THEATRE**

One of the largest and most acclaimed professional theatre companies in the metro Washington D.C. area, Round House produces new works and literary adaptations at its 400-seat Bethesda theatre and its 150-seat black box theatre in Silver Spring, Maryland. The company also operates a state-of-the-art Education Center to serve over 40,000 youth and adults with education and outreach programs. Now in its 30<sup>th</sup> season, Round House is led by Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison, who created the critically-acclaimed Literary Works Project, re-envisioning contemporary and classical books in a theatrical context for today’s audiences, including Dana Yeaton’s adaptation of the best-selling novel *Midwives*. In January of 2006, Round House hosted Penumbra’s production of *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers* in conjunction with The National Museum of the American Indian. Upcoming productions include Ken Ludwig’s new adaptation of *Treasure Island* and the world premiere of Karen Zacarias’ comedy *The Book Club Play*. Round House Theatre is a member of LORT and TCG. [www.roundhousetheatre.org](http://www.roundhousetheatre.org).

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## QUICK REFERENCE

- Production:** *REDSHIRTS*  
Written by Dana Yeaton
- Director:** Lou Bellamy
- Ensemble:** James T. Alfred (Dante Greene),  
James Craven (Coach Tyrell Moore), Kimberly Gilbert (Tori),  
Cedric Mays (Jahzeel Wilson), Will Sallee (Dale Mayo),  
Kimberly Schraf (Dr. Audrey Yantz),  
Regina Marie Williams (Dr. Charlene Bigelow),  
Ahanti Young, (Curtis Combs).
- Design Team:** Lance C. Brockman (Scene Design),  
Martin Gwinup (Sound Design)  
Michelle Habeck (Light Design)  
Mathew J. LeFebvre (Costume Design)
- Dates:** September 6 – September 30, 2007  
Previews September 4 & 5  
**Opening Night, Thursday, September 6 at 7:30 pm**
- Performances:** Wednesdays at 10:00 am and 7:30pm  
Thursdays at 7:30pm  
Fridays at 8:00pm  
Saturdays at 8:00pm  
Sundays at 2:00pm and 7:30pm
- Special Events:** Xcel Student Matinee: Wednesday, September 19 at 10:00am  
ASL Performance – September 15 at 8:00pm  
Performance with Audio Description – September 30 at 2:00pm
- Tickets:** 651-224-3180 or [penumbratheatre.org](http://penumbratheatre.org)
- Price:** \$15 - \$35
- Theatre Location:** 270 North Kent Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102
- Media Contact:** Julie McGarvie, Marketing Director, 651-228-6784  
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*Season presented by Star Tribune and Minnesota Monthly*