

**NEWS FROM PENUMBRA THEATRE**

*For Immediate Release*

**Contact:** Julie McGarvie, Director of Marketing: 651-288-6784

[julie.mcgarvie@penumbratheatre.org](mailto:julie.mcgarvie@penumbratheatre.org)



***Word(s) PLAY!***  
***New Play Series at Penumbra***  
***Funded in part by the Jerome Foundation***

May 22, 2008; St. Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, the nation's preeminent African American theatre, proudly announced today the launch of ***Word(s) PLAY!***, an annual forum designed to develop new plays by African American playwrights. ***Word(s) PLAY!*** will introduce three new plays to the Twin Cities **May 30 - June 1, 2008.**

This three day event will offer a staged reading of each play followed by an open talk back with the playwright, artists, audience and dramaturge Sydne Mahone, Professor of Theatre, University of Iowa. This year the lineup includes an adaptation by Keli Garrett of Charles Johnson's *Faith and the Good Thing*, *Etymology of Bird*, a contemporary play by Zakiyyah Alexander, and *The Road Weeps, The Well Runs Dry*, a historical play by Marcus Gardley.

***Word(s) PLAY!***

**May 30 at 8:00 PM:** *Faith and the Good Thing* an Adaptation by Keli Garrett,  
Directed by Dominic Taylor

**May 31 at 8:00 PM:** *Etymology of Bird* by Zakiyyah Alexander,  
Directed by Faye Price

**June 1 at 3:00 PM:** *The Road Weeps, The Well Runs Dry* by Marcus Gardley,  
Directed by Dominic Taylor

The plays will be read by a company of professional actors that includes: Ansa Akyea, Terry Bellamy, Jamecia Bennett, James Craven, Santino Craven, Adam Harris, Rex Isom Jr., Celeste Jones, Iman Milner, Greta Oglesby, Thomasina Petrus, Renardo Pringle, Ron Schultz, Ashford Thomas, Corey Walton, Harry Waters Jr., Ahanti Young, and Austene Van.

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

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Penumbra's associate artistic director and curator of *Word(s)PLAY!*, Dominic Taylor said, "This year's playwrights are some of the most exciting African American writers penning work today. They are in a continuum of African American Writing along with August Wilson, Ntozake Shange, Ed Bullins, Alice Childress, Adrienne Kennedy, Langston Hughes, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Amiri Baraka, Angelina Grimke, Lorraine Hansberry, Aishah Rahman, George C. Wolfe, Theodore Ward, William Wells Brown... We need to keep developing new artists for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century—We need to continue the legacy."

## **PLAY DESCRIPTIONS**

### ***Faith and the Good Thing an Adaptation* by Keli Garrett**

Young Faith Cross takes her dying mother's advice to leave the rural south and head to Chicago in search of her "Good Thing." Along the way, she encounters many challenges and travails only to realize that the journey is the thing itself and that one really can go home again. *Faith and the Good Thing* draws on the magical folk wisdom of the Black South, West African cosmology, St Augustine and the Greeks to relate this odyssey of a 1970's "brown sugar soul sister seeking the good thing in the dark days."

### ***Etymology of Bird* by Zakiyyah Alexander**

The year is 2008 and another long hot summer in Brooklyn, New York has begun. B-boys, fly girls, and MCs mix with merengue, salsa, dancehall, and the new cop on the block to keep New York a collision of contradictions. Birdy and Jermaine have known each other forever, but this summer, they see each other for the first time. The *Etymology of Bird* is a love story about our neighbors, our neighborhoods, and the choices we make that can change everything.

### ***The Road Weeps, The Well Runs Dry* by Marcus Gardley**

A community of self-proclaimed Freeman (Black Seminoles and people of mixed origins) incorporate the first all black U.S. town in Wewoka, Oklahoma. This group wrestles with identity as basic survival is in doubt as they forge a new life in Oklahoma in the mid-1800s.

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## ARTIST BIOS

**KELI GARRETT** has produced and developed her plays at Dixon Place in New York City, the Zoo District in Los Angeles, The LAByrinth Theater, New York Theatre Workshop, 24 Hour Plays, Playwrights Horizon in New York, Rites and Reason Theatre, Victory Gardens Theatre, City Lit Theater Company, Chicago Theater Company, Organic Theater, The Providence Black Repertory Company and The California College of Arts and Crafts. Her work has been commissioned by The Rhode Island Arts Council, The Joyce Foundation, City Lit Theatre and the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. Keli is a member of the Playwrights Center and the Dramatists Guild, where in 2004-2005 she was a fellow. In 2004-2006, Keli was a resident member of The Women's Project Playwright's Lab and in 2006 a LaNapoule Artist in Residence. She was also the Walter E. Dakin Fellow in Playwrighting at the Sewanee Writers' Conference in 2007. She holds an M.F.A. 1999 in Creative Writing from Brown University, where in 1997 she was a Beinecke Foundation Fellow. She holds a B.A. in Theatre from Columbia College.

**ZAKIYYAH ALEXANDER** is a playwright, performer, and educator. She is the author of *After the Show: A Play in Mask*, *Pralaya*, *Blurring Shine*, (900), *Elected*, *The Etymology of Bird*, and *SICK?* Her work has been produced and developed at Summer Play Festival (SPF) at Theatre Row, Greenwich Street Theatre, NY International Fringe Festival, La MaMa E.T.C., Pace Theatre, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Creative Place Theater, and The Producer's Club. Her work has received readings at the Women's Project, Actors Express, New Dramatists, The Vineyard Theatre, and New Professional Theatre. Her work has been commissioned by GALE GATES et al, among others, and is currently commissioned by Mt. Holyoke. Awards and Fellowship include Dramatists Guild, Theodore Ward Prize, Jackson Phelan Award, Fellowship at New Dramatists, Drama League New Directors/New Works, New Professional Theatre Playwriting Award, and Young Playwrights Inc. Her work is included in the latest edition of *New Monologues for Women by Women*. She is a resident member of New Dramatists, the Women's Project Playwrights Lab, alum of EST's Youngblood, and former resident at New Perspectives Theater. She holds an M.F.A from the Yale School of Drama.

**DOMINIC TAYLOR** (Associate Artistic Director) has been a practicing theatre artist for the past 20 years, recently relocating from New York to Saint Paul. He has directed a variety of theatre projects and musicals including the new opera *Fresh Faust* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and the cantata *The Negro Burial Ground* 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, and Ensemble Studio Theatre among others. He holds both a Bachelors and a Master of Fine Arts from Brown University. He has been appointed Assistant Professor in Directing at the University of Minnesota.

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**FAYE M. PRICE** (director) is a Penumbra Company member. Select Penumbra credits include *Eden*, *The African American Company Presents Richard III*, *Jar the Floor*, and *Zooman and the Sign*. Most recently, she served as the August Wilson *Twentieth Century Cycle* Transliteration Artist for Penumbra's production of *Gem of the Ocean* presented at the Guthrie Theater. She currently serves as Co-Artistic Producing Director for Pillsbury House Theatre. 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 dramaturg 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.

### **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. This season, Lou and Penumbra journeyed to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota. For the latest news and updates, visit [www.penumbratheatre.org](http://www.penumbratheatre.org).