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Tickets: Penumbra Theatre Box Office
651-224-3180 or penumbratheatre.org



***Fences* by August Wilson**
Presented by The Cargill Foundation

August 13, 2008; St. Paul, MN: Penumbra Theatre Company, the nation's preeminent African American theatre, proudly announces the opening of *Fences* written by August Wilson, directed by Lou Bellamy, **August 21, 2008**. The production will run **August 21—September 21, 2008**.

A Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, *Fences*, is the story of Troy Maxon who by all rights should have been an American baseball legend. When his rapid rise through the Negro leagues hit the ceiling of racial prejudice, Troy was forced to let go of his dream for major league success. Now his son has won the attention of college football recruiters – an opportunity to achieve the dream his father could not. Can Troy quiet his own demons enough to support his son or will he strike out once more? Set in 1957, *Fences* is the heartbreaking story of a man and his last chance at bat.

Starring: James T. Alfred (Cory), James Craven (Gabriel), Marion McClinton (Jim Bono), Elayn J. Taylor (Rose) Kevin D. West (Lyons), James A. Williams (Troy Maxon), and Marianna McGee and Mahogany Ellis (sharing the role of Raynell).

In a world ruled by the dictates of segregation, Troy thought of baseball as an opportunity to play by the rules and win, but his prime came before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier. Like so many of the quiet champions from this era, Troy's legacy died with the Negro Leagues. It was an era in which black Americans daily faced the injustice and humiliation of racism.

1957 is remembered for many reasons, but perhaps what shook the nation most deeply was the day nine black children went to school. Across the country all eyes were focused on Little Rock, Arkansas, where nine teenagers were admitted to the local public high school. These children, selected by the NAACP based on the merit of their outstanding academic achievements, bore the brunt of white America's resentment at mandatory integration. Orville Faubus, Arkansas' governor, called the National Guard to Little Rock in an attempt to prevent the students from enrolling. The "Little Rock Nine" as they came to be known, did enter the school amidst swarming protest after President Eisenhower sent federal troops to escort them. The event threw the country into racial crisis and by the close of the decade anger and resentment was mounting. Already the last bastions of segregation were beginning to give way. It would be only a few short years before one of the most significant sociopolitical shifts in the world, the American Civil Rights Movement, launched into full swing.

The 2008-2009 Season is proudly presented by Star Tribune and Minnesota Monthly

Wilson's *Fences* deftly captures the tensions of the 1950s, offering a unique and powerful insight into a turbulent era in American history. Penumbra proudly presents this play as part of its five year commitment to stage all ten of August Wilson's plays that chronicle black American life decade by decade. Penumbra will host Wilson's *20th Century Cycle* by staging two of his plays each season. Last year Penumbra launched the cycle with *The Piano Lesson* and *Gem of the Ocean*. This season includes *Fences* and *Radio Golf*.

Director Lou Bellamy states, "This great playwright, who found muses in his friends and fellow company members at Penumbra, took up the mantle to create stories and characters that were worthy of the black people he knew, of the richness of the culture he saw. Penumbra is honored to host Wilson's *20th Century Cycle* and offer audiences the opportunity to witness the work of a great writer staged by the artists he regarded so highly—and to rediscover a century of American Life."

ARTISTS' BIOS:

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*.

LOU BELLAMY (Director) is the founder and artistic director of Penumbra Theatre. He has been a member of the University of Minnesota's faculty for 31 years and is currently appointed to the rank of Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance. Recent awards include the 2007 OBIE for Direction and the 2006 McKnight Distinguished Artist Award. Recent directing credits include *Two Trains Running* at the Signature Theatre in New York, *Jitney* at Kansas City Repertory Theatre and Arizona Theatre Company, and Penumbra's production of *Gem of the Ocean* presented at the Guthrie Theater. Recent directing credits at Penumbra include *The Piano Lesson*, *REDSHIRTS*, *Get Ready*, *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*, *Zooman and the Sign*, and *Black Nativity - A Homecoming*.

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MARY K. WINCHELL (Stage Manager) is in her 22nd season with Penumbra Theatre. Most recently, she stage managed Penumbra's production of *Gem of the Ocean* presented at the Guthrie Theater. Other Penumbra credits include *The Piano Lesson*, *Get Ready*, *Black Nativity: Twenty Years of Holiday Cheer!*, *Seven Guitars*, *Jitney*, *Two Trains Running*, *King Hedley II*, and *Dinah Was*. She has stage managed at the Orpheum Theatre, State Theatre, Pantages Theatre, Children's Theatre Company, Jungle Theater and the Coconut Grove Playhouse in Miami. She has lent her talents to Macy's Glamorama, served as production stage manager for *Dorothy Hamill's Nutcracker on Ice*, and the Aveda Corporation including Aveda's 20th Anniversary Celebration at Radio City Music Hall, and Super Bowl XXVI *Winter Magic*.

SARAH BELLAMY (Dramaturg) is Penumbra Theatre's Education Director. A playwright and educator, she holds a BA in creative writing and post-colonial theory from Sarah Lawrence College and a Masters degree in Caribbean history and the trans-Atlantic Slave trade from the University of Chicago. She is currently working toward her doctorate in cultural studies and critical discourse at the University of Minnesota.

JAMES T. ALFRED (Cory) recently appeared at Penumbra in *REDSHIRTS*. He also performed in the Penumbra's co-production with Kansas City Rep and Arizona Theatre Company of August Wilson's *Jitney*. Other theatre credits include *To Kill a Mockingbird* at Kansas City Rep and Arizona Theatre Company, *Conversations on a Dirt Road* and *Killing Me Softly* at the ETA Creative Arts Foundation in Chicago, *Sundown Names* at the Chicago Theatre Company, and *Romeo and Juliet* at the American Repertory Theatre. Film and television credits include Fox's *Prison Break* and the film *One Week*. He is a graduate from the Institute for Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University, and holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in acting from the Moscow Art Theatre School in Russia.

JAMES CRAVEN (Gabriel) is a long time Penumbra Theatre company member. He was most recently seen in Penumbra's production of *Gem of the Ocean* presented at the Guthrie. Other recent Penumbra credits include *The Piano Lesson*, *REDSHIRTS*, co-produced with Round House Theatre; *Get Ready*; *Zooman and the Sign*; and *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldier*. He performed recently 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 and was awarded a 2007 McKnight Fellowship.

MAHOGANY ELLIS (Raynell) is an honor student at Breck School. She is interested in acting for the stage, television and film, spoken word and modeling. Her stage credits include *The Living Nativity*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *A Bug in Michael Bird Boys Garden*, *Alice's Rockin Adventures*, *Once On This Island*, *Heartbeat of the Drum*, *The Wiz*, *City Children's Nutcracker*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *The Story of Hope*, *Nickel and Dime*, *Young MLK and a Child Shall Lead*, *Macbeth*, *The Dining Room*. She has appeared in several television commercials, and performed in the film *Agora* and in the Rondo Oral History Video Project and Curriculum/Interactive-CD.

MARIANNA MCGEE (Raynell) is making her Penumbra Theatre stage debut. She attends the Perpich Center for the Arts and Education where she has performed in *Hearts & Bones* and *Under Milk Wood*.

MARION MCCLINTON (Jim Bono) is an accomplished director, actor, playwright and a longtime Penumbra company member. Directing credits at Penumbra include *The Dutchman*, *A Soldier's Play* and the 1993 production of *The Piano Lesson*. Marion has directed at many theatres throughout the country including the Mark Taper Forum, The Goodman Theatre and Pittsburgh Public Theatre as well as on Broadway. Most recently, he directed *Bulrushes* at Pillsbury House Theatre. Marion has received an OBIE Award for Direction, a Drama Desk Award and a Tony nomination. He is a New Dramatist Alumni.

ELAYN J. TAYLOR (Rose) is a Houston native now living in Los Angeles. Elayn recently appeared as 'Lena Younger' in Houston at The Ensemble Theatre in the production of *A Raisin in the Sun*. She received a best actress award for her work. In Los Angeles she played 'Rose' in The Odyssey Theatre production of *Fences*, earning an Ovation Award nomination. Also in Los Angeles, she appeared as 'Ella' in the West Coast premiere of *Permanent Collection* at The Kirk Douglas Theatre. Elayn has been in a number of television shows and commercials and is looking forward to the release of three independent films this year, *Humboldt County*, *You Own Me*, and *Defiled*. Elayn is a lifetime member of the Actor's studio.

KEVIN D. WEST (Lyons) is a Penumbra company member. Penumbra credits include *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*. Kevin has also performed with Children's Theater Company, Jungle Theater, Mixed Blood Theatre, Pillsbury House Theatre, Alchemy Theater, History Theater, Theater Latte Da, Minnesota Jewish Theater, the Guthrie Theater and the Phoenix Theater. Film and television credits include *The Death of Tommy Grime*, *Sweet Caroline*, *Kingdom Hospital*, *Bill's Gun Shop* and *Justice*. Kevin serves as Artistic Associate with the Capri Theater where he teaches acting to high school students.

JAMES WILLIAMS (Troy Maxon) is a founding Penumbra company member. He has also performed at Pillsbury House Theatre, Children's Theatre, Illusion Theatre, Guthrie Theater, Centerstage, The Goodman, Mark Taper Forum, The McCarter, Seattle Rep, Yale Rep, and on Broadway in August Wilson's *Radio Golf*. He has led performance workshops throughout the world including at Brown University, University of Minnesota, the International School of Kenya, Nshupu School, Tanzania and Penumbra Theatre Summer Institute. In 2009, he will head the drama program at Shangalia School in Nairobi. He is a recipient of the 2008 TCG Next Generation Leaders Grant, St. Paul Companies Leadership Initiative in the Neighborhoods Grant, 2003 City Pages Artist of the Year, and a 2005 NAACP Image Award Nominee.

C. LANCE BROCKMAN (Scenic Designer) is a professor of theatre design at the University of Minnesota where he has been on 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*. In addition, Lance provides master classes and workshops nationwide on historical painting techniques, and maintains an active design career.

DON DARNUTZER (Lighting Designer) designed the lighting for the Tony nominated Broadway show *It Ain't Nothin' but the Blues*. He also designed the Off-Broadway shows *Hank Williams: Lost Highway*, *The Immigrant* and John Denver's *Almost Heaven*. Don has worked for the Guthrie Theater, The Denver Center Theater Company, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Mark Taper Forum, B.B. King's Blues Club in NYC, The Shakespeare Theatre, The American Conservatory Theatre, The Arena Stage, The Old Globe Theater, The Alley Theater, Geffen Playhouse, Kansas City Rep, Seattle Rep, Arizona Theater, Cleveland Play House, Palm Beach Opera, Minnesota Orchestra, The Minnesota Opera Company, Portland Opera, New Orleans Opera, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, San Jose Repertory, Saint Louis Repertory Theatre and Geva Theatre.

MARTIN GWINUP (Sound Designer) is an associate professor in the Theatre Arts and Dance Department at the University of Minnesota. 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 18 years. Martin has worked for the Frank Theatre, History Theatre, Children's Theatre, Cricket Theatre and Eye of the Storm. Recent design credits at Penumbra include *REDSHIRTS*, *Get Ready*, *Blue*, *Black Nativity – A Celebration of Family*, *A Celebration for the Soul...Testify!* and *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers*.

MATHEW J. LEFEBVRE (Costume Designer) most recently designed costumes and set for Penumbra's production of *Gem of the Ocean* presented at the Guthrie. Penumbra credits include *Get Ready*, *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. Costume design credits at the Guthrie include *She Loves Me*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wintertime*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, and *School for Scandal*. He has also designed for Milwaukee Rep, The Kansas City Rep, Arizona Theatre Company, Trinity Rep, Theatre de la Jeune Lune, Geffen Playhouse, and American Players 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. Last season, Lou and Penumbra journeyed to the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This season, Penumbra and the Guthrie will join forces once again to stage Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*. For the latest news and updates, visit www.penumbratheatre.org.

Quick Reference

- Production:** *Fences*
Playwright: August Wilson
Producer: Penumbra Theatre Company and Lou Bellamy
Sponsor: The Cargill Foundation
Director: Lou Bellamy
- Ensemble:** James T. Alfred (Cory), James Craven (Gabriel),
Marion McClinton (Jim Bono), Elayn J. Taylor (Rose)
Kevin D. West (Lyons), James A. Williams (Troy Maxon), and
Marianna McGee and Mahogany Ellis (sharing the role of Raynell)
- Design Team:** C. Lance Brockman (Scenic Designer), Don Darnutzer (Lighting
Designer), Martin Gwinup (Sound Designer),
Mathew J. LeFebvre (Costume Designer)
- Dates:** August 21 – September 21, 2008
Previews August 19 & 20
Opening Night, Thursday, August 21, 2008 at 7:30 pm
- Performances:** Wednesdays 7:30pm
Thursdays 7:30pm
Fridays 7:30pm
Saturdays 7:30pm
Sundays 2:00pm and 7:30pm
- Tickets:** 651-224-3180 or penumbrateatre.org
Price: \$18 - \$38
- Special events:** Symposium on October 1, from 6:00 - 8:00pm
at the University of Saint Thomas
ASL Performance on August 30, at 7:30pm
Performance with Audio Description on September 14, at 2:00pm
- Theatre Location:** 270 North Kent Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102
- Media Contact:** Julie McGarvie, Marketing Director
651-288-6784 or julie.mcgarvie@penumbrateatre.org

The Twentieth Century Cycle by August Wilson

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|---|-----------------------------------|
| 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> |