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BLACK NATIVITY: A SEASON FOR CHANGE

**By T. Mychael Rambo
and Lou Bellamy**

**Directed by Dominic Taylor
Presented by Target**

**December 3 - December 27, 2009
Previews December 1 & 2**

About *Black Nativity*

by Stephanie Lein Walseth, August Wilson Fellow

Throughout its twenty two years on the Penumbra stage, the gospel Christmas musical *Black Nativity* has undergone continual change. Originally written by the prolific poet and playwright Langston Hughes in 1961, the play debuted on Broadway, toured Europe, and was broadcast on television in 1963. Its impact has stretched from coast to coast, and each year in addition to Penumbra's production, companies in Boston, Seattle, San Francisco, Cleveland, Chicago, and New York present their own version of the Nativity story. Under the artistic guidance of Lou Bellamy, Penumbra has shaped and re-shaped *Black Nativity* by framing it within different critical points in African and African American history. These moments have included the Reconstruction period, featuring a journey of recently emancipated African Americans northwards, biblical times in North East Africa, and most recently, a contemporary setting in St. Paul. In this incarnation, we are taken into the home of recently widowed Grandma Walker and her family who are met with the spirit of hope and holiday cheer by a stranger. Soon the home is filled with song, dancing, the sharing of presents, and the tradition of quilting. By focusing on the quilting tradition, Penumbra brings attention to an integral and lasting African American skill. Both *Black Nativity* and quilting have served as ways of preserving, telling, and re-creating the stories of African Americans in this country. The quilt you will see in the production today has been a community creation of local artists dedicated to keeping those stories – biblical, ancient, and recent – alive.

SYNOPSIS

Henry Walker has recently passed away, leaving a large and loving family. This holiday season, the Walkers are confronted for the first time with celebrating Christmas without one of the pillars of their family. Overtaken by grief, Grandma Walker has had difficulty finding the energy to move forward, and her family, though under one roof, has become fragmented. With the unexpected visit of a stranger, a few angels, grandchildren and a new great-grandchild, Grandma's spirit is renewed. Through spirit and the power of song, the family is sewn together, wrapped up by a quilt of cultural, communal, and Christmas memory.

SETTING

Grandma Walker's house in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The present.

2009 SONG LIST

The Twelve Days of Christmas

(Traditional English Carol, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

Iman Fears

'Zat You, Santa Claus?

(Composed by James Fox, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

T. Mychael Rambo

Boogie Woogie Santa Claus

(Composed by Mabel Scott, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

Ginger Commodore

This Christmas

(Composed by Donny Hathaway, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

Jackson Hurst

The Soulful Noel

(Composed by Donald Lawrence, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

T. Mychael Rambo, Ginger Commodore, Iman Fears, Jackson Hurst, Greta Oglesby

I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In

(Traditional English Carol, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

Dennis W. Spears

Children Go Where I Send Thee

(Traditional, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

Dennis W. Spears, Nicole Foster, DeMarcus Green, Jennifer Whitlock

Go Tell It on the Mountain

(Traditional, Adaptation by Keith McCutchen)

T. Mychael Rambo, Ginger Commodore, Iman Fears, Jackson Hurst

Joy to the World

(Music and Lyrics by G.F. Handel, Arrangement by Keith McCutchen)

T. Mychael Rambo, Ginger Commodore, Iman Fears, Jackson Hurst, Nicole Foster, Jennifer Whitlock, Greta Oglesby, DeMarcus Green

Little Drummer Boy

(Music and Lyrics by Davis/Onorati/Simeone, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

Jackson Hurst, Iman Fears

I Wonder as I Wander

(Music and Lyrics by J. J. Niles, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

Dennis W. Spears

My Way's Cloudy

(Traditional, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)
Ginger Commodore, Iman Fears, Nicole Foster, ENSEMBLE

Oh Jerusalem in the Morning

(Traditional, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)
*T. Mychael Rambo, Ginger Commodore, Iman Fears, Jackson Hurst, Greta Oglesby,
Dennis W. Spears, Nicole Foster, DeMarcus Green, Jennifer Whitlock*

No Room at the Inn

(Traditional, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)
Greta Oglesby, Ensemble

Turned Away

(Music and Lyrics by J.D. Steele)
Iman Fears, Jackson Hurst, Dennis W. Spears, Ensemble

Mary Had a Baby

(Traditional, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)
Nicole Foster, Ensemble

The Soulful Noel (Reprise)

(Composed by Donald Lawrence, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)
Sanford Moore

What You Gonna Name That Pretty Little Baby?

(Traditional, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)
Greta Oglesby, Ginger Commodore, Iman Fears, Nicole Foster, Jennifer Whitlock

I Love the Lord He Heard My Cry

(Traditional)
T. Mychael Rambo

Christ is Born

(Traditional, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)
T. Mychael Rambo, Ensemble

Sweet Little Jesus Boy

(Traditional)
Ginger Commodore

O Come All Ye Faithful

(Traditional)
Iman Fears, Nicole Foster, Ensemble

Angels We Have Heard on High

(Traditional French Carol)
Ensemble

Seven-fold Amen

(Music and Lyrics by P.C. Lutkin)

Ensemble

The Soulful Noel (Reprise)

(Composed by Donald Lawrence, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

Dennis W. Spears, Greta Oglesby, T. Mychael Rambo

Go Tell It On The Mountain

(Traditional, Arrangement by Sanford Moore)

Ensemble