

GET READY

A stylized illustration of several blue legs wearing high-heeled shoes, positioned as if on a yellow circular stage floor. The background is a dark blue gradient.

By Jaye T. Stewart and Joe Plummer

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Directed by Lou Bellamy

Musical Direction by Sanford Moore

Choreographed by Austene Van

Penumbra Theatre Company Study Guide

Educational Tools

Penumbra Theatre Study Guide

Greetings! Thank you for visiting Penumbra Theatre Company's **Study Guide Library**. We are so pleased that you seek to extend and engage your understanding of the drama we produce and the thematic issues it brings to the fore.

Penumbra Theatre Company occupies a very unique place within American society, and by extension of that, the world. Penumbra was borne out of the Black Arts Movement, a time charged by civic protest and community action. An artist making art by, for and about the black community was charged with merging aesthetic (artistic) principles with ethical (moral) ones. Subsequently, in this historical and political context, art had an agenda to strive toward social change. African American artists were part of, and greatly influenced, the social currents that carried people from their homes, schools and places of worship to the streets.

Bonding artistic interpretation with civic responsibility engenders an important kind of creative dissonance, a harmony of balance. It creates something neither art nor civic action could do alone. This is mission driven art, informed by a black ethos and aesthetic, which can adequately illuminate our experience. **Ensemble Theatre** in that context is the creation of a community of people committed to the telling of a story that acknowledges the experience of everyone involved. This kind of art demands that each audience member recognize his or her place in relation to the art. When that happens, we begin to think about ourselves as interactive forces in a greater social context. Our own agency becomes clearer to us; our choices and reactions start to make sense within a broader, more nuanced environment. We begin to see that others have lived with similar issues, and that their perspectives have great potential to enrich our experience and help us problem-solve. This kind of art creates and sustains community. It encourages coalition.

The function of an **Education and Outreach Program** inside an institution such as Penumbra Theatre Company is to use informed discussion and interdisciplinary tools to unpack the issues stimulated by the drama. Just as an actor must learn lines and blocking before interpreting a character, we offer our audiences the practical tools so that they may respond to the art both critically and creatively. It is our job to push conversation, critical analysis, and commentary beyond emotion toward solution.

The **Study Guides** are meant to stimulate discussion, not to present a definitive voice or the "right answer." Theatre is *fluid*, active, interactive and reactive; we must engage it intellectually that way too.

We hope to create space for the themes inspired by the drama to take root and blossom. Penumbra invites audiences to participate in the art and social action, by using our Education and Outreach tools to locate their contribution, their voice, within the larger human story we tell over and over again. We love. We fail. We begin anew. Over and over, told by countless tongues, embodied by some of the finest actors and carried in the hearts of some of the most committed audience members; we speak our human lessons through the prism of the African American experience.

PENUMBRA THEATRE STUDY GUIDE
Get Ready

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The Artistic Process

The Social Symbolic: Individuals in Society

Art is a complicated process that we rarely fully engage. It stimulates emotional, intellectual, even physical responses in audiences. Art is so powerful because it is one example of a deep and necessary connection between an individual and the collective world. To better understand the process of art, it helps to consider this connection and how it works.

The connection between an individual and society is made by through complex systems of meaning and metaphor; groups of symbols created by humans that represent how we feel, think, see and understand the world in which we live. These systems represent the tie that binds us all to one another in relationships that constitute identity, and help us comprehend our human experience. Art is one such system and there are others too.

Individuals can only access these systems through the collective, social world. In order for a human child, for example, to learn to use language (really just a system of symbols, meaning and metaphor), that child must come into contact with other human beings who already grasp and make use of the faculty of language. Once the child is inducted into this social system, the symbols, meaning and metaphor common to all members of the community will eventually dominate the life-experience of that child and his or her ability to reflect upon or process that experience. In fact, these systems are so powerful, that the child will also only come to understand him or herself in relation to other community members, and only through the system of meaning and metaphor common to that group. This process is called socialization. A community's system of meaning, metaphor and symbolism forms its culture. Socialization does two things: it sustains culture and forms an individual's identity.

Social Commentary and the Nature of Art

Art works by tapping into a community's system of meaning, metaphor and symbolism to represent the experience, knowledge or reality specific to that culture. Art is ultimately the expression of an idea, emotion or experience through the creation of a symbolic structure. The artistic product does not have to have *physical structure* to be considered art. Music, story-telling, dance are all artistic modes that are active and not permanent. Instead art is defined by its ability to recreate human experience through the point of view of the artist and affect a response within an audience. This might seem fairly simple, or even obvious. A deeper examination, however, will illuminate the special quality of art and explain why it is so important to a healthy society.

Human beings have the unique ability to critically observe ourselves. We can, in other words, reflect upon our actions, emotions and experiences. The fact that the word "reflect" can mean "to think" and "to mirror, or reverse an original image back to its

source,” is quite telling about the nature of art. In the most basic terms, an artist creates a piece of art as a reflection of culture. Culture is made up of individuals, their experiences and the integration of all of these things to become more than the sum of its individual parts.

Artists use many different structures, or “mediums,” to communicate meaning. The artist’s effort to communicate his or her intent is both informed by, and limited to, his or her cultural perspective; no individual exists completely outside of some cultural context. Within that cultural context, the artist embodies different symbols that have meaning within the culture. His or her navigation of the cultural landscape will be informed by these symbols and will also inform the art too. This is what we mean when we talk about an artist’s “voice.” Even though the artistic product may not have sound (like a painting or a piece of sculpture) it was created by a particular person with a particular experience in a particular social context. The artistic product reflects those particularities (the artist’s perspective or point of view) and the meaning it conveys is determined by them.

Moreover, any form of communication (like language or art) requires the use of the symbolic tools of the culture. This means that in order to reflect the culture through artistic representation, the artist has to be able to stand both outside and inside a culture simultaneously (but never be totally in either place). Only from that vantage point can the artist use the symbolic tools of a culture to communicate what he or she observes about the culture itself. This is what is known as “artistic commentary.” It conveys the artist’s intent, or impetus for creating something.

The Role of the Audience and the Alienation of the Artist

The process does not end with the creation of an artistic product. Art needs an audience other than the artist who created it. In solitude, the artist may marvel at his or her creation—might even be enlightened or surprised by it—but the artist will remain unfulfilled without the participation of an audience. The artist was moved to respond to cultural stimuli, the response now requires an audience to receive it, absorb it and refract it back to the artist. This is the contribution of the artistic product to the cultural landscape that inspired it. This way the artist can observe the change engendered by his or her commentary. To comment on something is to change it.

If the nature of the artist is to observe, interpret and then comment in order to change, the nature of the audience is also to observe and interpret. Because each human being has been exposed to an infinite number of symbols in widely divergent patterns and trajectories, and at different points in our lives, each spectator will “read” (or make sense of, interpret the symbols) the artistic product differently. An entire audience might have similar emotional or intellectual responses to a piece of art, but each spectator will have a slightly different experience than his or her neighbor. When the members of an audience have an opportunity to discuss their experience, the entire group is enlightened or engaged, bound by the same artistic element. This is how art creates community. A kind of spontaneous culture is fashioned by virtue of a shared experience. The culture is

singular to itself because of the unique qualities of each audience member and any variance within the art.

The audience has one last critical role to play in the artistic process, and it is both enlightening and violent. The audience is invited to observe a translation of a common experience through the perspective of an artist. The audience is then momentarily able to achieve a similar distance from the culture as the artist did before creating the artistic product, but this time the audience starts at the end and works in retrospect back to the state of things to which the artist originally responded. They are afforded the benefit of the impetus for the art and the art itself simultaneously. This event illustrates the extent, or limit, to the intent of the artist.

In order to comprehend the art, in order to feel it, the spectator must contextualize it within his or her own unique experience. Of course this experience is largely determined by the spectator's cultural context. Even as the spectator experiences the art he or she changes it, manipulates it so that it will fit within the frame of reference particular to him or her. Art encourages all who use the system of symbolism, meaning and metaphor to consider it differently. This is where the integrity of the artist's original intent starts to break down, and it is the moment in which the artist **looses** the ability to control his or her artistic product. The artist can no longer speak for the art; the art now speaks for itself and for the artist. By virtue of its nature, an audience changes the artistic product fundamentally from the scope of what is intended by the artist to the full breadth of the potential audience experience. To claim the art is to fulfill it, it is also to sever it forever from its original intent—it is no longer defined by a striving to effect change through artistic translation and commentary, it is the reception of the comment and the realization of change. The artistic product has traveled a very great distance between the artist and the audience. It is now absorbed back into the cultural system of metaphor and symbolism and becomes another tool for communicating meaning. The artist is impotent to reclaim or control the artistic product. So to reiterate, the nature of the artist is to observe, interpret, comment and in so doing effect change. The nature of the audience is to observe, interpret, and claim.

Perpetual Motion: The Circle of Art and Culture

The manipulation, possible misunderstanding and absorption of the artistic product by the culture, is both a fulfillment and a violation of the artist. The only way for the artist to regain agency or engage his or her artistic product from this point on is to produce more art in response to the culture. This is how art is perpetual and how culture and art continually constitute one another. It stimulates growth in both arenas and so keeps a society from stagnating.

Summary

To review, an artist responds to cultural stimuli through the manipulation of symbols that the culture uses to communicate meaning. The artistic product is a blend of the system of meaning specific to a culture and the artist's interpretation of that system. The art produced is the artist's commentary. The audience functions as an agent of translation as it claims the artistic product for itself and alters it in order to access it. The culture absorbs the art and the artist no longer can change or access his or her artistic product now that it has entered the social realm of the symbolic. The artist can only create more art, using the tools of the cultural symbolic, a system that has already been altered by its absorption of the original artistic product. Thus art and culture are constitutive of one another.

A Brief Overview on the History of African American Theatre
Penumbra Theatre Study Guide

Aspects of the dramatic performing arts can be found in cultures around the world. Globally speaking, American Theater is a relatively new tradition. As theater has evolved from the African roots of Greek tragedy to Shakespearean epics, American stages have produced a wide range of plays, largely influenced by the diverse peoples inhabiting this nation. In its early years, American Theater reflected the lives of its proponents, namely white, property-owning, Christian men. Ironically, even as America established itself as a sovereign nation, the drama of the day came largely from Europe, which boasted a large canon of work. Still, as early as 1821 black American artists were creating, staging and performing for mixed audiences, showcasing both existing and original work.

One of the first theater companies to approach the dramatic performing arts from an African American perspective was The African Grove Theater in New York City. It was founded by William Henry Brown and James Hewlett, both who had traveled by ship throughout the Caribbean, where story-telling, performance, dance and music were essential to the culture and survival of the slaves working on sugar cane and tobacco plantations, salt flats and mines. The company performed tragedies and comedies from Shakespeare to American playwrights. Eventually, the need for work that came from within the African American experience proved itself. Two years after it opened, the first play written and produced by an African American was presented there in 1823. The play, *The Drama of King Shotaway*, by Brown, played to mixed (though predominately black) audiences that year. However, many whites were adamantly opposed to the existence of such a theater and frequent police raids, harassment and threats forced Brown and Hewlett to relocate the theater several times throughout the lower East side of Manhattan. Eventually, the white opposition won out over the tenacity of the black actors, directors and producers of The African Grove Theater Company and it closed its doors permanently.¹

¹ For more information see Bernard L. Peterson Jr.'s "Introduction: The Origin and Development of the Black American Playwright from the Antebellum Period to World War II," *Early Black American Playwrights and Dramatic Writers: A Biographical Directory and Catalog of Plays, Films, and Broadcasting Scripts*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) 1-21.

As Americans established a canon of their own, dominant political and social trends were addressed by the work. One of the nation's most successful and fraught enterprises was racialized slavery in the American South. Depicted on white stages, black characters often fit into stereotypical characters which would haunt American stages for decades to come. Some of the most prevalent of those were the Sambo, the Uncle, the Mammy and the Jezebel. These stereotypes would be reflected over and over again in the theater, usually depicted by white actors in blackface.

Minstrelsy, a tradition born out of the plantation culture of the antebellum South, was very popular in the 19th Century. White entertainers would do comedic impressions of, or parody, the stories, songs and dance, jokes and music of black slaves for white audiences. Minstrelsy was a very lucrative form of theater for many years. White audiences filled houses to laugh at representations of happy, contented and dim-witted slaves. The tradition would continue long into the mid-1900s. For many years, (largely due to the audience expectations created by these white performers) the only work black performers could find was to perform in minstrel shows, *in blackface*. It reinforces the notion that the depictions of blackness and black people on white stages was not real. Even black actors had to “perform” white ideas of blackness by darkening their skin, wearing silly costumes and miming white actors' depictions of stereotypes.

In Hollywood, some of America's most revered epic films depict the early stereotypes created in the theater and in the 1920s and 30s. Black artists, writers and musicians began responding to the racist depictions and creating their own artistic representations of black life and philosophy. This period of burgeoning talent and new work is known as The Harlem Renaissance. In 1923, the first serious play written by a black playwright was produced on Broadway. It was called *The Chip Woman's Fortune* by Willis Richardson.² Still, the prevalent trend was for white artists and producers to pull from black narrative, song and dance and parody it for audiences. Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer were particularly concerned with white representations of blackness in the theater. Read below, Langston Hughes' famous poem “Notes on Commercial Theater”:

² Ibid., 165.

You've taken my blues and gone --
You sing 'em on Broadway
And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,
And you mixed 'em up with symphonies
And you fixed 'em
So they don't sound like me.
Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

You also took my spirituals and gone
You put me in Macbeth and Carmen Jones
All kinds of Swing Mikados
And in everything but what's about me --
But someday somebody'll
Stand up and talk about me --
Black and beautiful --
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!
I reckon it'll be
Me myself!

Yes, it'll be me.³

This poem echoes one of the founding tenets of another critical moment in black theater history, the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. It was during this period that some of the most celebrated black writers responded vociferously to the racism American citizens were struggling against in the Civil Rights Movement. Self-representation became a major focus of the movement—art was created by, for, and about black people. Artists such as LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Ed Bullins, Nikki Giovanni, Harold Cruse, Ray Durem, Adrienne Kennedy, Larry Neal and Sonia Sanchez all produced seminal work during this period of time. In 1959 Lorraine Hansberry's famous play *A Raisin in the Sun* opened on Broadway in New York City. It was the first time a play written by a black playwright, directed by a black director (Lloyd Richards) and written about black people was presented at this level. The next twenty years saw an eruption of African American theater companies springing up around the country, one of which was Penumbra Theatre Company in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Founded in 1976 by Artistic Director Lou Bellamy, Penumbra addressed issues of racial tension and misrepresentation between what were visibly separate black and white Americas. Over the last 30 years, Penumbra has provided a consistently clear message that the African American experience is rich, dynamic and critical to the American

³ Hughes, Langston. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. (New York: Vintage, 1995) 215.

theater canon. While visiting the Twin Cities, playwright August Wilson said of Penumbra:

It was with the indomitable spirit associated with pioneers and visionaries that Lou Bellamy took a handful of actors over [sic] twenty years ago and challenged them not only to believe in themselves but to have a belief larger than anyone's disbelief. When I walked through the doors of Penumbra Theatre [sic], I did not know that I would find life-long friends and supporters that would encourage and enable my art. I did not know I would have my first professional production, a musical satire called *Black Bart and the Sacred Hills*. I did not know then what Penumbra Theatre would come to mean to me and that there would come a time when Penumbra would produce more of my plays than any other theatre in the world. And that their production of *The Piano Lesson* would become not only my favorite staging but a model of style an eloquence that would inspire my future work. I only knew that I was excited to be in a black theater that had real lights, assigned seats and a set that was not a hodgepodge of found and borrowed props as had been my experience with all the black theater I had known. We are what we imagine ourselves to be and we can only imagine what we know to be possible. The founding of PTC enlarged that possibility. And its corresponding success provokes the community to a higher expectation of itself. I became a playwright because I saw where my chosen profession was being sanctioned by a group of black men and women who were willing to invest their lives and their talent in assuming a responsibility for our presence in the world and the conduct of our industry as black Americans.⁴

Through artistically excellent theater, Penumbra has sought to plumb the depths of the human experience by presenting culturally specific and historically accurate depictions of African Americans. Sadly, many of the black theater companies founded during the BAM have closed over the years, largely due to lack of funding, managerial problems and poor attendance. Penumbra's survival is a testament to all the people who believe in its power for social change. Our artists, administration, audiences and community have consistently buoyed us up and kept this important institution afloat on the occasionally stormy seas of non-profit arts administration. Today, because of our growth and the changing world, Penumbra is widely regarded as a pioneer of cross-cultural dialogue. Our template of finding the universal through the specificity of human experience has become a model for teaching, arts application and criticism. We are nationally and internationally recognized as a preeminent African American theater company.

Lou Bellamy explains that black people not only "have to be at the table" to engage in cross-cultural conversations, but host such debates as well. In an America that increasingly more often accepts oversimplified answers, we seek out nuance and enjoy disturbing the veneer. At Penumbra, we provide the table at which artists and audiences

⁴ August Wilson, excerpted from a speech given at Penumbra Theatre Company, 1997.

alike may sit down and rigorously engage one another with complicated questions. We are proud to have these artists in our midst and excited to produce work that circumvents a hackneyed black / white binary.

Synopsis

Get Ready

*Once the smooth crooning kings of soul music, The Doves are now on the other side of the fence; more than a bit outdated, estranged from one another, and plagued by the cramps and impediments of old age. After years apart, they come together again when a producer suggests a reunion album and possible tour. They may be a bit rusty but the magic six still have it, that wonderful combination of soulfulness and sweet sincerity that make the ladies swoon. Theirs is a music to fall in love to. Reunited for a last gasp tour, they realize along with the old music comes the old conflicts too. Their dreams, egos and loyalties require a reckoning with the past. Told with humor and real tenderness, *Get Ready* is the story of six legendary musicians stepping into the light.*

Act I, Scene 1: Knobby's Dance Studio

The Doves have a dance session scheduled with Knobby Coles, an elderly vaudevillian performer turned dance instructor to help them get ready for their upcoming tour. This is the first time the members of The Doves and seen each other in years and tensions rise to the surface when Roscoe, the band's lead singer, is late. When he finally arrives Roscoe announces he won't be joining the tour—he has decided to go solo, managed by his wife Eva Dee, a blues singer with whom The Doves have bad blood.

Act I, Scene 2: The Topper Club

Knobby tries to convince Eva to release Roscoe from his contract with her and allow him to tour with the Doves. She refuses but invites the Doves to sing in her club. Whether this invitation is out of a sense of retribution or a desire to make amends remains unclear.

Act II, Scene 1: Knobby's Dance Studio

The Doves are practicing their songs. Knobby's employee Jr. joins in, playing one of their songs in a contemporary style. The Doves tell Jr. what it was like performing in the South during segregation. They recount a particularly horrific instance of racial violence.

Act II, Scene 2: The Topper Club

Eva and Roscoe have a domestic argument which is also about the management of Roscoe's singing career.

Act II, Scene 3: Knobby's Dance Studio

Roscoe invites the Doves to see his solo show that evening at The Topper Club. Later that evening, Roscoe panics and leaves the stage in the middle of his set.

Act II, Scene 4: Knobby's Dance Studio

Jr. wins a musical talent show contest and recording contract. The Doves offer personal and professional advice. After much deliberation, they decide to go on tour without Roscoe. Roscoe and Eva arrive and a confrontation that has been building for years is played out and finally resolved.

Whose Music Is It?
Dramaturgical Notes
by May Mahala, August Wilson Dramaturgical Fellow

Get Ready, by Jaye Stewart and Joe Plummer is a play about the relationship between musicians and the struggle for control over music they make. Playwrights Stewart and Plummer offer us an intergenerational take on this issue by creating characters that span three generations. The Doves, middle age crooners whose heyday was circa 1960, embody the essence of performers like Al Green, Otis Redding, and The Platters. Their dance instructor, Knobby Coles, comes from an earlier generation of great vaudevillian performers such as The Nicholas brothers and Bill “Bo Jangles” Robinson. Knobby’s employee Jr. is a young man who dreams of getting his break from a music contest much like “American Idol.” Each character in this play is involved in their own personal struggle to find their own voice and to be adequately and fairly compensated for their artistic work.

The play touches on some of the challenges of musical production such as exploitation from management, performing during segregation, drug and alcohol abuse, and the often harsh conditions of touring. It also celebrates, however, the musical achievements of three generations of music makers through the inclusion of songs in the style of the 1960’s, great dance numbers, and the expression of a very real love for both the work and people who created it.

As is the case in theatre, the music that these characters create is also a collaborative art form. Therefore, much of the plot focuses on the negotiation of interpersonal relationships that are part of a collective artistic effort. As the last play of a season focused on African Americans’ relationship to music, *Get Ready* resonates with themes broached earlier in this season. Like Penumbra Theatre Company’s production of *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, this play addresses the rich history of African American musical entertainment. As in *Black Nativity*, this production includes the struggle to find dignity and strength through musical expression. Similarly to *Blue*, *Get Ready* presents the relationship between each character and their music as both highly personal and as a method of forging connections and community with others.

Contextual Essay
by Sarah Bellamy, Education Director

PROLOGUE

Get Ready is more than the story of six musicians trying for one last chance at fame. By using *The Doves* as the metaphorical embodiment of a particular moment in American history, their story becomes emblematic of our own struggles with the past, both its pain and its glory, and where, how and if it is possible to integrate it into our contemporary lives.

This often humorous dramatic musical is extended to a much deeper level when presented at Penumbra Theatre Company. By virtue of our mission, to illuminate the human condition through the prism of the African American experience, our staging of any play interacts with and challenges the history of stereotypical representations of black people that have cycled through American culture. These depictions, and our counter-images, have created a tapestry of powerfully evocative and emotionally charged cultural metaphors in which Americans encounter, consider, and avoid talking about, our very particular racial history and its impact on the present.

By situating the story of *The Doves* within an historically informed context of the Civil Rights Movement, it is possible to highlight the creative ingenuity and strength of spirit that black artists and musicians have maintained, contributing enormous sustenance to each other, to the culture and the larger black community, since our entrée into this country.

This essay is in celebration of that spirit.

Sarah Bellamy
March 2007

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Throughout this paper I will use the terms “we,” “us” and “our” to describe a culturally specific group affiliation that is at once personal, familial, communal and national. Each level is interrelated and each has its own experience, none of which can be taken out of context of the larger historical framework of American history.

The academy often makes the traditional choice to attempt to subsume the first person quality of a piece of writing to the thoughts it engenders. This pedagogy runs counter to the experience of “marked” individuals (that is race-marked, gender-marked or otherwise distinct from the elite white, heterosexual, Christian able-bodied male). We speak from and through the material of our bodies, through our corporeality, and let this experience inform ideology. It is necessary to understand that all human beings have a point of view from which they speak, informed by a culturally relevant and specific identity. To ignore this fact is to assume that there is an absolute or “true” experience of humanity that is knowable, isolated and univocal. In an increasingly more global context, we know that is impossible. To speak from a communally grounded perspective is to join in the hum of humanity, to celebrate the harmony of all of our voices, and marvel at the music it makes.

What Music Can Move: Rhythm, Blues and Resistance in *Get Ready*
by Sarah Bellamy, Education Director

Introduction: Situating the Song

Get Ready is a story that many know. The Doves, once the smooth crooning kings of romance, find themselves on the other side of the fence, more than a bit outdated. Time has estranged them from one another. They are plagued by the cramps and impediments of old age. It seems their days of glory are nearly out of reach for good.

Then, out of the blue, a young hotshot producer comes to them with a pitch: a reunion album and possible tour. Hungry and cautiously hopeful for one last shot at fame, The Doves come together again. It is not long before they realize that along with the old music come the old struggles too. Unresolved conflict causes painful memories to flare up. The Doves must reckon with the past in order to imagine a future together.

In many ways the story of *Get Ready* is a microcosmic staging of the American story. Ours is a country rent by a painful racial history we are still unable to face, yet the influence of racism on American society is thorough. It is deeply rooted into governance of the country and our national culture. Often we ignore history, shelve it, press things deeply into the corners of our collective mind so that we do not have to think about where we have been, and how it haunts us now. The terrible irony is of course that we are where we find ourselves now because of where we've been; we can only go forward from where we are. Reconciling the past is the only way to get ready for the future. It is the only preparation we can exact and yet we fight it tooth and nail.

Between a Rock and a Soft Spot: The Nostalgic Reordering of History

Get Ready examines the ways in which it is challenging for The Doves to find an audience in contemporary culture. As they take the stage, their appearance feels antiquated. Their voices are not as supple, their bodies are slower and their range of motion has diminished. Time has made them seem small, suspended in time. Yet there is still something in the music that pulls people in. The music is nostalgic. It indulges a yearning for romance. We long for what we imagine were simpler times, a time when the lines between right and wrong were clearly delineated. This is the place in which The Doves are pinned. The playwright offers important social commentary as to the import of history on the present vis-à-vis their reunion. For example, as the group argues against Roscoe's desire for a solo career, it comes out that Roscoe believes The Doves are too antiquated for a revival tour:

ROSCOE: You guys are anachronisms.

BUNCH : Now Roscoe, everybody entitled to their opinions. But if you gonna call us names, it better be something I understand.

ROSCOE: . . .It means you living in a time that ain't here no more.

JOHNSON: Man it's always time for love. Love songs ain't never gonna die.⁵

The idea that the group is merely a relic of a long forgotten past does more than articulate a fear of failure. This is the same way that Americans deal with our collective history. We tell ourselves "what's done is done," and imagine events of the past have nothing to teach us about our present, much less our future. But as Vern explains after listening to Roscoe rant about the grand opportunity a solo career would present, ". . . If what you're sayin' is true, we don't wanna hold you back. But you thinkin' backwards man. 'Cause you thinkin' about where you goin' instead of where you came from."⁶ This idea echoes an African philosophy, summed up by the symbol of the Sankofa, a bird that looks both backward and forward simultaneously. Further, the idea that describes the

⁵ Plummer, Joe. *Get Ready*. (First produced by Victory Gardens Theatre, Inc. Chicago, IL, 1994) 31.

⁶ Ibid.

future as *progress away from* the past could be in fact “backwards,” is a play on words that illustrates a simple wit particular to an African American lexicon that relies heavily on *double entendre*.

Ironically, a reunion tour for The Doves would be successful only if they are able to capitalize on another American penchant of avoiding the past: namely, nostalgia. When we do revisit our past, often we look back through rose-colored glasses. We reach for a figment, a fabrication that remembers history as we wish it were in hindsight, not as it was in sum. Drawing it to us piecemeal, we mine the good and leave as much of the bad as much as we can. This is the nature of nostalgia, the romance of it, that somehow where we were was better than where we find ourselves presently. It is this very bet that The Doves are willing to wager in taking the stage once more. They are hoping to play on that nostalgia piece. They are betting that America wants to go back, needs to go back, but cannot bear it without something tender, something softly intoxicating to supplicate the national anxiety about our history.

America at the middle of the century was entrenched in a project to categorize, delineate, territorialize, and define the culture through institutionalized segregation known as Jim Crow law. The lines were anything but clear. Jim Crow only made black and white seem separable or clearly defined. Instead, American history links black and white Americans to one another in a struggle for power and salvation. These are the threads of our national tapestry, the colors of the flag we fly over the capital and lay upon the coffins of the honored fallen. It is the messiness of this interconnectivity, the recognition of culpability, relation and interdependence that makes us so afraid to look back. Ironically, though, it is present in our proudest moments as a nation.

Genre Wars: Implications of Profit and Cultural Property

The Doves sing what is known as Doowop. This genre, defined in its early stages by the use of nonsensical syllables in long-rhythmic patterns (different than “scat” which was a riff that had a staccato beat), was evident as early as 1956 when the Five Satins released “In the Still of the Night.” In this song, the refrain goes something like: “doo-

wop doo-wah, bow do-doo,” and repeats itself, setting up a rhythmic structure that replaces a traditional, instrumental baseline. This element defined a style of music that was supple but not overtly sexy, patient but persistent, wide-eyed and wonderfully naïve.

Doowop is a subgroup of Rhythm and Blues, a classification that in and of itself has an interesting history and purpose. The term R&B (Rhythm and Blues) came to replace what had been traditionally called “race music.” Music scholar Guthrie Ramsey Jr. sees his book *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, as an “attempt to identify and explore some of the ways in which meaning is achieved in various styles of African American music.”⁷ In it, Ramsey describes the various interpretations of the term race as it pertains to the history of the music and cultural production so described:

The concept "race" is recognized in most academic circles as a "fiction" and social construction and has become almost reviled in today's cultural criticism. But the word at one time represented a kind of positive self-identification among African Americans. The black press routinely used "the Race," for example, as a generic term for African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, calling oneself or being referred to as a race man or race woman became a way to display pride in being an African American and in having efficacy in the affairs of one's immediate community. I use the word *race* in these senses, not to embrace a naive position of racial essentialism, but as an attempt to convey the worldviews of cultural actors from a specific historical moment.⁸

Ramsey explains that “[t]he term ‘rhythm and blues’ (R & B, in music business parlance) came into vogue in June 1949 when the trade-paper Billboard substituted it for Race, the term that had been used since 1920 to describe black records made by black artists.”⁹ Race music, the rubric that initially defined any music produced by black artists, was replaced by the term rhythm and blues in part because it opened the genre up for

⁷ Ramsey, Jr., Guthrie P. *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*. 1

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3

⁹ Shaw, Arnold. “Researching Rhythm & Blues” *Black Music Research Journal*, Vol. 1, 1980 (1980), pp. 71-79; 71.

white artists eager to try their hand at the style that was incredibly successful.¹⁰ Yolanda Williams points to two genres of music that betrayed race and class connotations: one was race music. The other was known as “hillbilly” and was used to define music created and performed by poor white Americans. In time, Williams explains, race music became Rhythm and Blues and hillbilly was resituated as Country and Western. The discourse used to describe these genres underscores defining cultural characteristics important to the music. Moreover, the terms begin to realign and articulate the ethnic and class status of the greater “minority” groups as well.

The redefinition of boundary, the creation of new genres and subgenres and the continual breaching of boundaries as artists with what became known as crossover appeal, speaks volumes about the instability and fraught state of the American psyche at this time. Not only was the situation of this genre within the larger American musical canon telling, but the genre itself was borne out of a time of shifting social change, of the collapse of old boundaries and the mounting revolutionary spirit harnessed by the Civil Rights Movement.

Too Young to Know Better: Love, Youth Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement

It is not surprising that often it is the young people in a community who rebel against hegemony, oppression, tyranny. The youth contribution to the Civil Rights Movement, though not foremost in the history books, was powerful. They were children who walked solemnly through crowds thick with hatred, held back by armed guards, into classrooms in the south for their morning arithmetic lessons. They were teenagers and college students who organized sit-ins and started the Freedom Rides to boycott segregated public transit. And they were children whose lives were taken one Sunday morning in the fall of 1963 in a church bombing, four little girls between the ages of eleven and fourteen. It was in their name, in honor of their young lives cut short, that outrage poured through the country, making Birmingham the very epicenter of the struggle for justice, peace and retribution. Like the romantic heart green enough to dream, the youth activists did not know what a different America would look like or mean. They

¹⁰ Williams, Yolanda. Personal Interview. 28 March 2007.

just knew where they were and that it was not a living place. A living place is free. Black people were striving to emerge from life besieged, from sheer survival.

In many ways the idealism of Doowop mirrored the unabashed hope at the core of the Civil Rights Movement. Like the “fool who falls in love,” the will to jump headlong into a dream, to face an uncertain, unscripted future was at the center of Civil Rights Era activism. It was brazen, bald-faced hope; faith, in spite of history; courage instead of fear. The music echoed and also engendered expectant optimism. The brightest stars of the genre were adolescents, like Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, who hit the charts and ran to the top with their 1956 single “Why Do Fools Fall in Love?” The script imagines The Doves to be middle-aged in their reunion, maybe a bit older. This would make them teenagers during the 1950s Doowop era. In the peak of male puberty, budding sexuality and not yet wise to the ways of the world. This would put them in many precarious situations.

The implications of their blackness, their maleness, highlight the profundity of the historical moment for American society. Young performers often only marginally understood the complexity of the business they were in. Trepidation would have tempered much of the thrill of fame and hyper-visibility. Mass adoration did not amount to full inclusion into society, or change their second-class status when they were not onstage. They had to be on guard. Behind every doting smile offered by a young white girl loomed images of black bodies scorched and swinging from trees, genitals castrated or mutilated beyond recognition. On the turn of a dime, with one word, their lives could be in utmost danger. Black sexual masculinity was under spectacularly violent siege. The romance business for these young men was dubious at best. It was a very, very fine line to walk.

It is exactly this scenario that surprised the young Doves on their first tour of the South. The fact that the story comes out addressed to JR, the youth presence in the play, representative of the future but carrying the past in name JR is junior, it implies inheritance, legacy. Johnson wants Frankie to tell the story as a kind of inoculation for

the boy. He understands the importance of passing on the stories from the past, even when revisiting them can be painful, as it is for Frankie.

JOHNSON: Traveling through the south back then, in a station wagon full of Negroes back then, was like walkin' through a lion's den with lamb chop drawers on. I swear. Ask Frankie.

FRANKIE: I don't discuss that.

JOHNSON: You should. A young blood like JR need to know those kinds of things.

FRANKIE: It ain't JR's business what happen in the south, those days is long gone.

JOHNSON: How can you say it ain't his business? That's what's wrong now. These youngsters don't know nothin' about how it was, and those old enough to tell it, try and act like it didn't happen. This boy is supposed to be one of us now. . . don't shut him out.¹¹

Though many traveled with a manager who could impart some guidance and protection, often these performers, many young, were left to fend for themselves while on tour.

In the South, even through the late 60s in some areas of the North, black musicians could not rely on the normal systems for lodging, protection, and sustenance. As they traveled the circuit, if boarding houses were not available, performers stayed with relatives or friends of relatives, in church basements, in their cars, some even pitched tents in fields for the night. The next day they had to get up, find a place to wash and dress themselves, eat, and then perform at venues that evening where audiences expected to see clean-cut, well-appointed performers at the very top of their game. Should there be some sort of altercation with locals, the judicial system was callous and police forces offered no protection or respite. In fact, it is exactly this scenario that is at the heart of challenge with The Doves getting back together.

¹¹ Plummer, 52.

JOHNSON: Back when we first got together we wasn't nothing but teenagers. And we got a hit record and got sent out down south on tour. . .we was playing a gymnasium. . .had a rope going down the middle of the room. Blacks on one side. Whites on the other. We never seen no shit like that. Soon little white girl sent a note to Frankie to meet her after the show. Girl's Daddy was suspicious of her and followed her. . .beat her within an inch of her life. Then him and his boys—they was State Trooper mind you—set up in the dark and waited for Frankie. That's how Frankie lost his eye.

It is not a coincidence that in order for The Doves to reconcile the past they must retell the story, and they must tell the story to the next generation, represented by JR. Healing is applying knowledge to, making meaningful, our suffering. History lives as a lesson rather than just another painful, chaotic circumstance too painful to remember.

Where We've Been: Why History Matters

It was stories like these that encouraged a philosophy of total care that was at the center of the preeminent black record label Motown Records. Certainly Berry Gordy, with a keen sense of marketing, had reasons for cultivating well-bred artists on his label. But his efforts were not solely monetarily driven. The Civil Rights Movement was well underway when Gordy launched Motown Records in Detroit, Michigan. Most visible in public arenas where the call for desegregation of schools and public transport was hotly contested, the nation finally had to face its history in order to move forward. The nightly news echoed the rising fervor in the streets, as the call for social change was met with increasingly more brutal reactions. Riot police were commonly on site at schools, community centers, and public arenas where segregationist law kept black and white people separate. The United States government, particularly the administrations for Presidents Eisenhower, Johnson and later Kennedy, were faced with the complicated task of implementing systems required to support an infrastructural overhaul of the American South. The times were stressful and scary. Unprecedented change had stoked a hopeful

fire in the hearts of Civil Rights advocates finally beginning to see returns on their struggle as the system started to give under the mounting pressure.

The immediate cost of the collapse of this system was high and often inflicted in spectacularly violent, insidious ways. For example, the Supreme Court decision to enact the desegregation of schools in *Brown versus the Board of Education* (1954) had sent reverberations throughout the South. When black students challenged the status quo to attend traditionally white schools, they faced serious retribution. In fact attending a morning arithmetic class often endangered their lives. The seriousness of the situation was finally recognized on a national scale when Dwight D. Eisenhower mobilized federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas to protect nine children attempting to go to school. This was seen as an historic gesture, particularly significant because Eisenhower's decision mobilized American troops against American citizens. In the fall of 1963, the same year Berry Gordy sent the Marvelettes, Motown's first successful "girl group," on tour through the South. This was the atmosphere into which Berry Gordy sent the Motown performers on tour, many who had never left Detroit. Teaching them to be observant, cautious, teaching them proper decorum and how to be articulate was all in part to protect these young musicians with a layer, albeit thin, of etiquette armor.

Any situation really could come down to a question of life and death on the road for black musical performance groups, especially when young and not wise to the ways of the world. The business itself was murky, often peopled with shady mob-connected characters. In spite of all the dangers, there was a palpable urge to strike while the iron was hot. The record labels and producers, largely white, that managed groups such as these saw unbelievable profits. World War II had primed the American stage with love letters flung out over oceans, with stories of unrequited, dedicated love, tales of sailors returning to waiting women, all pledge and promise and fidelity. One thing became quickly evident to those in the entertainment business. The American public loved love and nothing did love quite like Doowop.

American Romance: Race, Gender and Sexuality in Teen Culture

Doowop was the green version of the blues: love without knowledge of heartache, of jealousy, infidelity, poverty, oppression or fear. It bespoke the desire of a courageous heart that knew not its courage, for it knew not the possibility of injury. It was love unbound, tender, striving and pure. It was still entertainment, though, and as such it had to sell. Marketing these groups to an expansive American audience was a very controlled and complicated process.

The marketing of groups such as these sought to soften the clearly delineated boundaries determined by racial segregation. Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, The Doves, and similar teen idol bands appealed to “bobby-soxers,” audiences full of young swooning girls. Image was paramount to the success of these groups. Garnering a loyal following amongst the bobby-soxer crowd promised fortune. But it was a fine line to walk. The bobby-soxer culture described virginal femininity striving for romantic experience. In order to reach teen idol status, to crossover to both black and white audiences, black male performance groups followed strict grooming rules, sported mint costumes and practiced savvy but chaste dance steps. The image was designed to be romantic instead of sexual, endearing instead of arousing. It was supposed to mirror the sweet awe the bobby-soxer culture exuded on the outside, not the furtive desires they explored in the back seats of Ford Tudors and Chevy Bel Airs. The only chaste way America would embrace rhythm and blues was through Doowop. Consequently, America’s hit love songs in the 1950s and on into the 60s were asexual, immature. The emasculated status it engendered (or rather un-gendered) in the young black performers created only a limited window of opportunity; eventually the talented youth performers would grow up and obviously, inexcusably become men.

In the forties, just before the term R&B came into colloquial usage and split the pot of rock and roll into racially segregated genres, musical giants such as Little Richard and a decade later James Brown were performing rock and roll with an unsurpassed energy and particular flair for performance. The spectacle of their acts was not unlike

those of preachers and pastors who rocked their congregations, their fervor mounting as they fed off the energy of the people, becoming more and more swept up in the glory of getting happy with the Lord. It was not uncommon, in fact, that going to see one of these artists was often colloquially referred to as “going to church.” It is not a coincidence that Brown became known not as the “father” but the “Godfather of Soul.” There was a certain familiar sentiment of religiosity to his dramatic stage performance. It was a taste for grandiosity that many, from musicians to televangelists, would mimic.

All the Might They Could Muster: Reclaiming Masculinity and Refocusing Racial Revolution

James Brown was born into the heat of the Jim Crow South, in Barnwell South Carolina. As a youth, he earned a living wage picking cotton, cleaning store-fronts and even “buck dancing” for troops home on leave from Germany during World War II. Buck dancing was a tradition of performance that influenced tap, and came out of the vaudeville and minstrel tradition. Often it was white performers in blackface that performed “buck dances,” a dance style so-named from the derogatory moniker for black men. Brown quickly learned how to perform, to sell an idea, an image. His early career was launched as a singer with The Flames. Brown and Byrd's group toured the Southern "chitlin' circuit," and the group eventually signed a record deal. The group's first recording was the single "Please, Please, Please" (1956). It would not be long, however, before James Brown, the penultimate hustler and performance artist, would find a stage from which he could speak from the heart about the state of American society. The times were quickly changing and the music scene would be indelibly altered as well. Brown would be one of the first prominent examples of an accepted black male protest voice.

As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, the taste for the romantic gloss of Doowop dwindled. American culture was splitting open. Everywhere the visage of innocence, of unsullied prosperity, was torn apart. American society was facing sweeping change. The country was redefining the terms of citizenship. Black Americans had grown tired of their second-class status in a nation built by the unpaid labor of their kin and community. Recognition of that contribution meant that as citizens black people were

heir to the same rights as whites. In 1950, America did not look that way at all. The very principles upon which the nation was founded were being called into question.

Brown would deliver an anthem to the people in 1968 with “Say It Loud (I’m Black and I’m Proud).” Eventually, Brown would come to represent a very urgent black masculinity that was undaunted, unfiltered and proud. Songs like "It's A Man's, Man's, Man's World" and “Get Up, Sex Machine,” in the seventies accompanied Hollywood’s interest in what would be known as Blaxploitation films, which portrayed the hustle and jive talk of the street.

Conclusion: And the Beat Goes On...

Musicians were often the spirit of the revolution, and ushered in social change by attracting white audiences undaunted by their increasingly more visible commitment to present truthful representations of the culture. The simple lyric was turned with a hint that bespoke an entirely hidden lexicon for communication behind, beyond and running parallel to mainstream modes of communication. As Larry Neal wrote, these artists were “*blues people*, smiling and shuffling while trying to figure out how to destroy the white thing,” how to get out from under the yoke of racism, oppression and injustice. The bluesman “is the master of understatement. Or in the Afro-American folk tradition, he is the signifying Monkey, Shine and Stagolee all rolled into one.”¹²

As Neal writes, though, often these musicians were called to the music because they shouldered so much of the injustice and violence but had no outlet for their suffering and rage but the creation of rhythms to call together the people; this rhythm could be present in textiles, in music, in painting, in poems, onstage, in speakeasies, in ditches and kitchens and fields. The rhythm saved the people; bled the people. It opened them up to purge the toxins of external and internalized racism. The rhythm let them bleed and find communion amongst each other in that call and response, catch and fall again kind of mode.

¹² Neal, Larry. “The Black Arts Movement.” *The Black Aesthetic*. Addison Gayle, Jr. Ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1972) 267.

Music is an undocumented, living archive of black American life, culture and history. Moreover, music provides us with a critical site for cultural excavation. As Ramsey writes,

The communal rituals in the church and the underdocumented house party culture, the intergenerational exchange of musical habits and appreciation, the importance of dance and the centrality of the celebratory black body, the always-already oral declamation in each tableau, the irreverent attitude toward the boundaries set by musical marketing categories, the same intensive, inventive, and joyful engagement with both mass-mediated texts and live music making, the private performances of class-status and gender, the fusion of northern and southern performance codes, the memories of food, sights, smells, and the ritualized spaces of what the old folks called drylongso, or everyday blackness. All these combine to form living photographs, rich pools of experiences, and a cultural poetics upon which theoretical and analytical principles can be based.

The Doves represent part of that historical archive. When they show up they look dated, awkward, out of place. We need to make room to let them impart their knowledge, sing their songs of love, redemption and survival to us. Americans in general need to learn to take history off the shelf, let it live amongst us and recognize how it informs our contemporary daily lives. It is largely due to the massive denial as to the history of violence engendered by slavery, oppression and racism that we will not look back through time. Thus we are destined to repeat the same mistakes, but cognizant at least of our choice not to learn from what has gone before which impresses a sense of helplessness, culpability and guilt for something we will not name. It seems ominous, generally oppressive and frightening. It keeps us silent, scared and defensive.

For black Americans music has been the carrier of our culture. It provided the means to deliver encoded messages in times of terror. It has relieved the weary in times of overwhelming struggle. It has let us laugh, cry and fall in love with one another. It has helped us come to be fluent in many different kinds of talk—whether through drum,

guitar, washboard or trumpet. It has created slang. Slang within slang. It has allowed us the space to love ourselves. It has kept kids out of trouble, passed on generations of knowledge and ancient wisdom. It has let us mourn the dead, build a life on piles of bones, gotten folks through workhouses and chain gangs, rocketed some to stardom, sent others straight to hell. Music let America ask black performers like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald to be our ambassadors abroad. Music carried the spirit of the revolution through the ages. It sent us to the streets, brought us home, to the juke joint Saturday night and then to church on Sunday morning. It is our collective, cumulative archive of cultural memory and our connection to one another. Music is life but more pointedly black life *is* music.



SARAH BELLAMY is an Associate Producer and the Director of Education for Penumbra Theatre Company in St. Paul, Minnesota. She is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College where she studied creative writing and postcolonial theory. She holds an M.A. in the Humanities from The University of Chicago in Caribbean where she specialized in colonial history from 1400-1800. Since returning to the Twin Cities, Sarah has focused her attention once again on creative writing including short stories, screenwriting and playwriting. Sarah has been commissioned to research and compose contextual essays that accompany the main-stage productions for Penumbra's 2005-06, 2006-07 Seasons. More information on Penumbra's education programs, including the highly regarded Summer Institute Program for junior high and high school students, and copies of the essays are available on Penumbra's website at www.penumbra theatre.org.

Direction Team

Get Ready

Directing a play means finding ways to extend the symbolic and metaphorical presence of a script for the stage. To do this, a director must integrate the different elements necessary for a theatrical production into a seamless whole. For example, a director must decide how to use the sound design to magnify a moment of tension onstage, or help an actor communicate emotion better for an audience. It means working on each aspect of the play in detail while being aware of the entire arc of the production itself.

The director also makes the decision to highlight some aspects of the story and not others, this way emphasizing topical issues or themes the playwright suggests to create a larger context for the play, to situate it properly. Each director brings a different perspective to the play. This is why a different story can be told with the same words, even the same actors. One director may choose to play up the tension between two characters while another may choose to emphasize the social and historical context of the play. The director makes the artistic product whole, balanced and sets the spotlight on what he or she finds most interesting or powerful about a script.

Choreographer

Austene Van

Sharp as a tack and as clean as the Board of Health are the first words that came to my mind when asked how I envisioned choreography for the Doves. The templates for recreating movement with romance, flair, and class were the Temptations, the Four Tops, Gladys Night and the Pips, to name a few. I've always been impressed by the fact that amidst the political unrest of their day, these groups epitomized cool, flawless, professionalism on stage. The smooth moves were always in harmony to the story of the songs and underscored spellbinding melodies as if "song" and "dance" were one word. African American groups in the 50's and 60's would croon and step into dramatic intersections between fierce competition and almost military unity. I wanted to pull that out through dance. For the audience, I wanted to touch senses that remembered when it was sexy to be well groomed and polished, and when just one rehearsed, beautifully articulated dance move could be all one needed to "say" to win the attention and affections of a certain someone. Enjoy!

Design Statements

Get Ready

The creative design team is responsible for making the text on the page into a literal reality onstage. Through the use of elements of sound, lighting, set and costumes, the designers create an atmosphere for the actors to use. Designers use methods such as color, temperature, or volume to help them as they work. Each of these methods can create a feeling onstage based on the tools the designer uses.

In production, the design elements come together with the text, the actors and the direction, to create a three dimensional world. Penumbra Theatre is guided by an Ensemble Aesthetic, which means that no element is more important than another. This is Penumbra's ethical approach to art, in which every voice is unique, necessary and communally rooted. This approach also creates artistic balance and excellence. The audience often does not realize that any of the elements were at one time separate. They are totally bound; the result is something greater than the sum of each of its parts. The result feels magical, feels real.

It is not magic, though. A lot of work goes into creating a production. Here you can read about the intent of the designers, how they arrived at their concepts and what challenges and methods they used to make their part of the play come to life.

Sound Design Summary
By Martin B. Gwinup, Sound Designer
Get Ready

Get Ready is about friendship and all of the baggage that is built up over years of maturing together. In the end, no matter how challenging, the commitment of being true friends remains.

The sound design for this production is in the beginning stages, but as always, its main purpose is to support the story and the mood of the show as well as to help the audience know where they are. The music used in the play will be what has been written for it. At present I don't see any need to add any other music to it. There might be other music for pre-show (music as the audience walks in) and intermission, but other than that, no external music.

The main thrust of the sound design for this show will be placement and support of action. Sounds that will help the audience know they are in the rehearsal studio or in the night club as well as tangent sounds like phone rings, etc. There is a little bit of video which will be used in this production. The scenic designer wants to see the street outside of the rehearsal studio through the window. This is where video will be used to reference this exterior. This will be more realistic and might allow for natural movement for the scenes there, however I do not want it to become distracting. There is discussion of reinforcing the voices at times during the play but I am still deciding where those places will be (definitely the end and possibly in the club). The use of reinforcement is simply to give the audience the feel of the expected live performance. We will also have to deal with the band being right down next to the audience. This will cause some acoustical challenges which will have to be dealt with but we will see about specifics once the set is in and how the band sounds. This is a strong script and I am sure it will be a powerful production.

Set Design Summary
By Lance Brockman, Set Designer
Get Ready

Most of the action for *Get Ready* takes place in Knobby's Dance Studio #1. Knobby is an old vaudevillian and his decrepit, old studio is located one half floor below the sidewalk of a busy street in Chicago. Although not called for specifically in the script, the director and I felt that this would promote a physicality that would reflect the age of The Doves or main characters of the script as they negotiated all of the stairs into and out of the studio.

Other scenes include the dressing room for Eva Dee--a diva that is beyond her prime. She also runs the Topper Club--an out-of-date night club that, like her, has seen better days. In the end of the play the space is transformed from the dark, textured, and aging world of the present into a shimmering world of the past. As this visual transformation occurs we see The Doves become the men and singing group of their prime.

Through out this production, the band is in full view. Exactly how they will interact and contribute to the production beyond accompaniment will be determined through out the rehearsal period. The scenic designer's responsibility is to present a world for the play and it has been a joy to work on this piece. It provides several challenges and perhaps more than any other, it is how to accommodate so many scenes on that intimate and magical stage. I hope you enjoy the performance!



Lighting Design Summary
by Mark Dougherty, Lighting Designer
Get Ready

Coming soon!

Costume Design Summary
by Matthew Lefebvre, Costume Designer
Get Ready

Coming soon!

Tools for Teaching *Get Ready*

The following are a series of questions you may use to prompt discussion, critical analysis or dialogue about this play. They may be used either before or after the play, either to guide audiences toward specific issues as they watch or, to stimulate conversation about topical issues afterward.

The Vocabulary of important terms refers to the Contextual Essay.

These questions are intended to meet the state standards for High School Language Arts and Literacy set by the Board of Education. (Grades 9 through 12).

Penumbra Theatre Company also offers Lesson Plans that use the script, the production, and the study guide to investigate specific themes. Each plan can run from approximately 15 to 45 minutes for discussion. Please contact the Education and Outreach Director for more details: sarah.bellamy@penumbratheatre.org

A Feel for the Times – Comprehension Questions

1. *Get Ready* revisits American life in the early 1950s. What are three relevant historical events or movements of the period?
2. How did the end of World War II affect American culture? How were veterans of the war, both white and black, received upon their return?
3. How does a bill become a law? What are the ways in which the Civil Rights Bill, proposed by John F. Kennedy Junior, was stalled in the Congress?
4. What did Civil Rights Activists want? Why were there some people reluctant to agree to their terms? What was at stake and for whom?

Critical Thinking and Analysis – Short Essay Questions

1. Why is it important that The Doves keep their name?
2. Think about Knobby's studio. In it are an old man, Knobby Coles, and a young man, JR. Why do you think the playwright included these characters?
3. It has been said that nostalgia is a desire for a memory that doesn't exist. How does *Get Ready* complicate or support this idea?

4. How does each character relate to history differently? What does the play say about memory and the importance of remembering the past?

Language Arts and Theatre – Reflection

1. How do the following elements of design help to situate *The Doves* within a particular socioeconomic, culturally specific moment?

Costumes:

Set Design:

Sound Design:

Hair and Make-up:

2. What do you think would be the most difficult to communicate from a designer's perspective, race or class? Why? What elements might you employ?
3. How might the staging of this show at Penumbra Theatre be different than if it were staged elsewhere?
4. How is music used to contextualize the play and add nuance?

Vocabulary – Important Terms

* Many of these terms were derived from and can be further elucidated online at www.wikipedia.org.

Aesthetics:	The philosophical theory and meditation about the concept of beauty and art.
Bobby-soxers:	A term coined in the 1940s to describe the overly zealous, usually teenage, fans of singer Frank Sinatra, who was the first singing teen idol. Typically, they would wear poodle skirts while rolling their socks down to ankle level.
Buck dance:	a pre-tap dance routine in the mid nineteenth century portraying African-American males comically as "bucks." The performances created archetypal stock characters that would be integral to American minstrel and vaudevillian traditions of performance.

- Bus boycott:** An organized effort to target the segregation of public systems of transit through breaking seating rules, finding alternate means of transit and public protest. Rosa Parks is credited with beginning the Montgomery bus boycott when she refused to relinquish her seat on a Jim Crow bus to a white passenger. She was subsequently arrested and charged with civil disobedience.
- Civil Rights Act:** President Lyndon Johnson signed the bill that made it a federal offense to discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in areas pertaining to voting, employment, and public services and spaces, such as transportation and public parks.
- Chitlin' circuit:** The collective name given to the string of venues throughout the eastern and southern United States, such as the Cotton Club and Victory Grill, that were safe and acceptable for African American musicians, comedians, and other entertainers to perform at during the age of racial segregation in the United States. Main theaters on the chitlin' circuit included the Apollo Theater in Harlem, the Regal Theatre in Chicago, the Howard Theatre in Washington, DC, the Uptown Theatre in Philadelphia, the Royal Theatre in Baltimore, and the Fox Theatre in Detroit.
- Class:** A device used to delineate social status within a society based on wealth, perception of wealth, and notions about who is deserving of wealth. Class also includes meditations on poverty, gender and race within the American context.
- Culture:** The defining characteristics of a group in relation to another group within a social sphere. Culture is defined in many ways including but not limited to a group's language, history, religious affiliation, race, gender, sexuality, class, economic status, education, cuisine, collective memory, media representation, legal history, political prowess, and ambassadorial relations.
- Doowop:** A style of music that was popular in American culture in the 1950s and mid 1960s. It is characterized by the use of nonsensical syllables in long-rhythmic patterns, was evident as early as 1956 when the Five Satins released "In the Still of the Night." In this song, the refrain goes something like: "doo-wop doo-wah, bow do-doo," and repeats itself, setting up a rhythmic structure that replaces a traditional, instrumental baseline.

- Freedom Riders: The Freedom Rides, part of the U.S. civil rights movement, were a series of nonviolent demonstrations protesting the segregation of public transportation in America. A total of 436 Freedom Riders, both black and white, were arrested on charges of trespassing, unlawful assembly, or violating state and local Jim Crow laws. They followed on the heels of dramatic "sit-ins" against segregated lunch counters conducted by students and youth throughout the South beginning in 1960.
- Ethics: The philosophical theory and meditation on morality.
- Jim Crow: A state and local project to categorize, delineate, territorialize, and define American culture and society through institutionalized enforcement of racial segregation. The notion that black and white Americans should remain separate at all levels of social and civic engagement dates back to the middle of the 1800s through the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1965. Often Jim Crow laws were open to interpretation and frequently used to justify the terrorist violence enacted on black Americans by the Ku Klux Klan and their supporters.
- Ku Klux Klan: A white supremacist, segregationist, anti-Semitic fraternal terrorist organization originated in the United States created at the end of the Civil War. The group is known particularly for its acts of hate against blacks in the American South that includes lynching (murder), cross-burning, violence against children and bombings. The KKK is particularly outspoken about "racial purity" and the "threat of miscegenation." In recent years the organization has also expressed anti-homosexual views as well. The head depicted in this square captures the elemental threat that anyone could be underneath the sheet and the fundamental cowardice of the group illustrated by their need to camouflage themselves so.
- Miscegenation: Racial mixing between the sexes through marriage or intercourse outlawed in the United States until 1967, when a landmark civil rights case known as *Loving v. Virginia* declared Virginia's anti-miscegenation statute, the "Racial Integrity Act of 1924," unconstitutional, thereby ending all race-based legal restrictions on marriage in the United States.
- Morality: A concept of ethics that deals most essentially with concepts of good and evil.

- Motown Records:** A record label founded by Berry Gordy, originally based out of Detroit, Michigan. It achieved widespread international success and is responsible for such monumental musical talent as Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross & The Supremes, The Temptations, The Four Tops, The Jackson 5, and Gladys Knight & the Pips. Motown played an important role in the racial integration of popular music as the first record label owned by an African American and primarily featuring African American artists to regularly achieve crossover success and have a widespread, lasting effect on the music industry.
- Race:** The categorical separation and distinction of one group of people from other groups based on genealogy, skin color, hair type, geography, nationality, and other socially constructed elements of humanity.
- Rhythm and Blues:** The term R&B (Rhythm and Blues) came to replace what had been traditionally called “race music,” the rubric that initially defined any music produced by black artists. It was replaced by the term rhythm and blues in part because it opened the genre up for white artists eager to try their hand at the style that up until then was specific to black American culture.
- Stereotype:** A socially constructed image or assumption of a particular group of people that relies on falsehood, caricature, and misrepresentation intended to subordinate, criminalize or make deviant that group of people within a particular social context.
- Subjectivity:** The state of being known to oneself and recognized within society. The ability to speak in the first person. The ability to know and name others vis-à-vis one’s position in the world.
- 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing:** Denise McNair (11 years), Carole Robertson, (14 years), Cynthia Wesley (14 years) and Addie Mae Collins (14 years) were killed on September 15, 1963, while in Sunday School when a Ku Klux Klan member blew up the building locking the girls inside and sealing their fate. The event was seen as a monumental turning point in the Civil Rights Movement as mounting tensions pushed more and more toward violent uproar. Dr. Martin Luther King would be instrumental in quelling the violence in his pledge for peace, love and brotherhood.

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