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**LEADING SOCIAL CHANGE FOR INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES:  
NATIONALLY CELEBRATED BLACK THEATRE COMPANY ANNOUNCES NEXT LIFE CYCLE  
AS A CENTER FOR RACIAL HEALING**

**The Penumbra Center for Racial Healing is a dynamic performing arts, wellness, and learning center developing new work, ideas, and sustainable strategies for social change led and generated by artists.**

**SAINT PAUL, Minn. (Aug. 6, 2020)** – Penumbra Theatre, a 44-year-old legacy black arts organization that was once home to playwright August Wilson, is evolving into the Penumbra Center for Racial Healing. Based in the historically black neighborhood of Rondo in St. Paul, Minnesota, Penumbra’s mission has long been to nurture black artists, promote racial equity, and inspire creative resiliency. Building upon this history, the Penumbra Center for Racial Healing will provide new artistic offerings, robust equity training services, a wellness center, and expanded staff to support the fresh areas of focus.

The vision for the Penumbra Center for Racial Healing has been in development since 2015, guided by Artistic Director Sarah Bellamy. An artist, scholar, and leading facilitator on issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, Bellamy has tested programs that cultivate empathy and invite active participation with public conversations, screenings, community meals, and educational programming that engage patrons across Minnesota. Through her leadership, Penumbra brings vibrant communities together to shift the ground under some of the most deeply entrenched issues of equity and justice.

Says Bellamy, “Penumbra is thriving and well positioned to evolve in a way that honors the history of the organization and manifests abundance and possibility. We are uniquely equipped to help Minnesotans acknowledge and address the racial disparities within our state while attending to the trauma sustained from weathering such conditions. We will be a center and provide resources for black people, learn from and support people of color who are not black, and welcome and support white people interested in building resiliency and competency for racial equity work. Working across sectors with key partners, our arts-based efforts inform adaptive strategies that build capacity toward change. It is my hope that this healing place will be both a national beacon and a local balm. It is badly needed and we are ready.”

Founded in 1976 by award-winning director and scholar Lou Bellamy, Penumbra is Minnesota’s only professional black theatre and is one of only three professional black theatres in the nation that offer a full season of performances. The celebrated institution has earned national accolades, producing nearly 200 plays, more than 30 premieres, and cultivated generations of artists of color now working across the nation, including Roger Guenveur Smith, MacArthur Genius Grant winner Dominique Morisseau, Obie winner Laurie Carlos, U.S. Poet Laureate Rita Dove, Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson, Grammy winner Jamecia Bennett, “Empire” star James T. Alfred, and McKnight Foundation Distinguished Artist Seitu Ken Jones. This new direction will create space for Penumbra to better resource black artists and evolve its tools to drive social change, both in Minnesota and across the nation.

“This moment in our nation’s history demands bold decisive action to address the generations-old trauma of racism that continues to grip communities everywhere,” said St. Paul Mayor Melvin Carter. “As an institution that has been serving our community for more than four decades, the Penumbra Center for Racial Healing will be a beacon for all of us as we move through these uncertain times toward a brighter future for our children and grandchildren.”

Visitors to the center will be welcomed to experience:

- **The arts:** The theatre season will include an annual repertory festival featuring interdisciplinary new work as well as mainstage shows, panel conversations, and educational programs throughout the year. Artists in residence will develop new work and resiliency strategies in response to what is on Penumbra’s stages.
- **Racial equity:** Year-round racial equity work led by artists will include lectures, workshops, seminars, and a leadership training institute for individuals and cohorts. The center will offer an opportunity to learn about and address the enduring disparities facing the black community, raising awareness and offering tangible strategies for solution.
- **Wellness:** A wellness program will feature a full fleet of holistic, culturally specific healing services including meditation, yoga, acupuncture, massage, and more informed by a curriculum especially designed to detoxify bodies from the stresses of living in a racially stratified society.

Penumbra has begun a multimillion-dollar initiative to fund program and business development and engage community in the realization of the center. Penumbra will harness the innovation, agility, and intelligence long housed at the organization to ensure that it remains vital for the next 40 years.

Individuals can become “Next Generation” members to help provide resources for black artists now and support Penumbra’s evolution. Members will receive special access to virtual readings and workshops by artists, guided meditations and reflections to support healing, and news about the development of the Penumbra Center for Racial Healing. Opportunities to participate in the planning process will be open to all community members through hosted listening circles.

"I found out first-hand the power of Penumbra’s work in connecting what we experience in theatre and our own personal social justice and racial healing work," says longtime supporter Phyllis Goff. "When I saw the last play, ‘The White Card’ by Claudia Rankine, which closed just before the COVID-19 pandemic, I was stunned by how I wanted to learn and digest more. It moved me to create my own post-play discussion group with friends who had been to the play, a group that continues to meet. We’ve had meaningful conversations that have deepened our understanding of racial issues in America. So I’m super-excited about Penumbra’s next life cycle, which will combine the theatre and a learning center – a place that allows for questioning, reflecting, and understanding. I’m additionally proud of the board for recognizing Sarah’s leadership and having the foresight to have approved this vision because Minnesota clearly needs it."

Artists have already created programming for the center and were midstream in a first pilot when George Floyd was murdered.

"The conferring of this cohort of artists during the course of what has been going on was no accident," says Emmy Award-winning actor and Penumbra company member T. Mychael Rambo. "I can’t imagine how I would have dealt with the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder on my own – it really could have been devastating. It was already devastating, but to know that there were other people who were doing great work in service of social justice, to know there were other people creating amazing art, all those things made me feel purpose-filled and useful and validated and helped me sort out the chaos that was going on around me."

While already living into its future, the organization is expected to fully transition into the Penumbra Center for Racial Healing within the next three years.

### **About Penumbra**

Penumbra is recognized nationally and internationally for its artistically excellent and socially responsible art that illuminates the human condition through prisms of the black experience. Penumbra opens hearts, rehearses strategies for change, and dispels dehumanizing narratives of people of color.

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