

**PENUMBRA THEATRE COMPANY**  
**Final Report Fiscal Year 2012: July 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012**

**CORE PROGRAMS**

Penumbra creates professional productions that are artistically excellent, thought provoking, relevant, and that illuminate the human condition through the prism of the African American experience. The ultimate goal of the mission is to make socially responsible art that provokes thought and action around issues of racism and social justice. Penumbra activates its mission through three core programs: the main stage brings artistically excellent stories to life with an unflinching commitment to cultural authenticity; the new play program ensures that the African American experience is preserved by developing uncompromising stories; and, the education programs mobilize the power of art to create social change.

FY12 celebrated the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Penumbra Theatre. It was an opportunity to pause and consider the scope of its growth both in black theatre and as a nation. The 2011-2012 season comprised the following activities which were presented at Penumbra except when noted.

**Main Stage – managed by Lou Bellamy, Artistic Director**

Main Stage is supported by study guides, classroom workshops, post-show discussions.

- *I Wish You Love* by Dominic Taylor at Hartford Stage, July 6-24, 2011
- *Two Old Black Guys Just Sitting Around Talking* by Gus Edwards at National Black Theatre Festival, August 5-6, 2011
- *Two Trains Running* by August Wilson, September 29-October 30, 2011. Presented by Cargill.
- *Come on Children, Let's Sing: A Tribute to Mahalia Jackson* by Dominic Taylor at Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church, October 21-23, 2011
- *I Wish You Love* by Dominic Taylor, November 18-December 4, 2011
- *Radio Golf* by August Wilson at Indiana Repertory, January 10-29, 2012
- *Radio Golf* by August Wilson at Cleveland Play House, February 10-March 4, 2012
- *The Amen Corner* by James Baldwin at Guthrie Theater, May 11-June 17, 2012

**Education – managed by Sarah Bellamy, Associate Artistic Director -Education**

Penumbra has built a nationally recognized education program to mobilize the power of art to create social change, activating our mission and maximizing the investment in the art.

- Summer Institute is an arts education and leadership training program for students, age 13 to 18, to challenge ideas, build community, and make a difference. The 2011 program ran July 5 – Aug 1 with a total of 26 students. See special review of this program at the end of this report.
- Two new programming ideas which were offered free to targeted groups of patrons. Over 355 people attended these four events which were hosted by Sarah Bellamy, Associate Artistic Director-Education.
  - Let's Talk Theatre, an informal and intimate gathering, created a relaxed environment to explore thought-provoking topics about theatre and the making of culturally specific art.
    - *Becoming Nat "King" Cole*, December 6, 2011
    - *Art in Action*, February 21, 2012
    - *Remembering James Baldwin*, April 2, 2012
  - Reel Talk screens a specially selected film for discussion.
    - *Race, The Power of an Illusion*, May 7, 2012
- Lecture series presented by the University of Minnesota and Penumbra Theatre: *Reshaping the Black Image on the American Stage: Penumbra's Legacy and Influence* with Lou Bellamy, January 26, 2012; Sydné Mahone, March 1, 2012; Harry Elam, April 19, 2012; and Paul Carter Harrison, April 26, 2012. Over 320 people attended and the presentations were taped and made available to the public.

- Penumbra Study Guides were written for each main stage production. These comprehensive and free guides provide a context for the art by making the play and its themes accessible and informative for all patrons. An average of 2,000 study guides are downloaded annually. The guides meet state curriculum standards and teachers found them most effective when used in conjunction with classroom workshops and post show discussions. In FY12, Penumbra hosted 38 post-play discussions for student and adult audiences.
- Penumbra Bookend discussions attracted over 100 lifelong learners seeking to better understand the context of the play, its themes and issues before they see the production, then exploring their own interpretations after experiencing the play. Penumbra hosts these free events for every main stage production.
- Penumbra conducted over 30 presentations around the Twin Cities reaching over 1,000 people at a variety of venues including the YMCA, Travelers, 3M, SuperValu, St. Paul Central Library, Anoka Ramsey Community College and educator forums.

### **New Play Development – managed by Dominic Taylor, Associate Artistic Director – New Play Development**

The OKRA play development program provides a rigorous yet nurturing, culturally specific environment for playwrights to develop their plays.

- Play submissions: Playwrights submit a 10-page sample script and answer a query on aesthetics, which is changed every year.
- Word(s)PLAY! Festival presents staged readings of plays that have been through a weeklong workshop to make the play ready for a full production. Over 350 people attended these performances: *Journey to the Door of No Return* by Psalmayene 24, July 16, 2011; *Sweet Maladies* by Zakiyyah Alexander, July 23, 2011; *Tell Martha Not to Moan* by Clinnesha Sibley, August 6, 2011; and *In Search of Assata* by Ed Bullins, June 23, 2012.
- The Gym takes creative ideas, not in scripted form, and immerses them in a weeklong session with other artists, so the originator can transform the idea into a script. This program is not open to the public. *Casket Sharp* by Rhada Blank, August 8-12, 2011; *Homage to Slick Rick* by Shaun Neblett, August 15-19, 2011; *Hollow Roots* by Christina Anderson, August 22-26, 2011.
- That's Cold was a monthly reading series of new plays: *The Black Cockerel* by Ademola Bellow, September 26, 2011; *How Shall We Lighten Their Loads?* by PJ Gibson, October 17, 2011; *Blackheart* by Rebecca Nichloson, November 29, 2011; *Tar's Children* by Christina Ham, December 19, 2011; *Existing Conditions* by Casey Llewellyn, January 23, 2012; and *Mr. Welfare* by Wendell Etherly, February 27, 2012. This program was discontinued, effective March 2012.
- The new play team also tested a new programming idea to allow patrons to experience the playwriting process. The Sankofa Reading and Response was held on April 14, 2012 with about 75 people in attendance. A staged reading of *Deacon's Awakening* by Willis Richardson, a classic black drama, was paired with 10-minute responses from three contemporary playwrights – Keli Garrett, Anton Jones and Ronnell Wheeler.

### **GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

Main Stage

Goal: Increase audience base locally and increase awareness nationally.

Outcome: Achieve national recognition equal to its local reputation as the preeminent African American theater.

In FY12, in spite of cancelling two plays, Penumbra had 43,757 in ticket sales, a 40% increase over FY11. Of that total, 11,757 tickets were sold for main stage shows at Penumbra plus 32,000 tickets sold for the presentation of *The Amen Corner* on the thrust stage at the Guthrie.

Nationally, 11,287 people attended our presentations at Hartford Stage, National Black Theatre Festival, Indiana Repertory and Cleveland Play House. National critical acclaim included features on the PBS NewsHour and the NBC newsmagazine, Rock Center with Brian Williams.

## Education

Goal: Increase the number and range of requests for the programs and tools.

Outcome: Become a national resource for quality, results-driven programs that deal with issues of racism.

Locally, 2,772 people attended programs, workshops and presentations at Penumbra and local businesses including YMCA, 3M, St. Paul Central Library, Anoka Ramsey Community College, and SuperValu. Program requests included RACE Workshops, Art for Social Change presentations, lectures, and play specific materials. Nationally, the Johnson C. Smith University of Charlotte, North Carolina has launched a fundraising campaign to support the development of the Penumbra Summer Institute program there.

## New Play

Goal: Move plays to the main stage at Penumbra and/or at other theaters. Long-term goal is to do it every year.

Outcome: Become a national resource to theaters seeking new culturally specific work.

16 new plays were developed at Penumbra in FY12. *Julius by Design*, developed in the Penumbra new play program, was scheduled for the Penumbra main stage in the 2011-2012 season but was cancelled.

## Individual Donor Cultivation

Goal: Increase contributed income from individual donors to 20%; long-term goal is 60%.

Outcome: Build toward a more dependable and predictable cash flow and funding source.

In 2004, individual support represented 9% of total contributions; in 2011, it was 23%. FY12 is projected to be 26%, representing eight consecutive years of growth.

## **GENERAL OPERATIONS – managed by Russell Zook, Managing Director – Administration and Chris Widdess, Managing Director – External Relations**

In FY12, Penumbra ended the year with \$229,000 of cash on hand. However, it had an unaudited \$1,144,209 deficit of which \$600,000 was an in-kind expense, (the income was charged in FY11.) The in-kind donation was from Comcast representing the value of a public service announcement which ran in four markets nationally from July through December 2011. The balance of \$544,209 was a cash deficit which resulted from a loss of anticipated income. The audit for FY12 will be presented to the board in January 2013 for acceptance. In FY11, Penumbra net assets were positive including change in unrestricted net assets.

The plan developed by the staff and board in FY12 to address a growing cash flow concern had limited success. The board and staff feel that it needs to devote its full attention to creating a new business model and plan in FY13. Consequently, it has decided to limit its programming in FY13 to one major show and a few of the new programming ideas tested in FY12. The time freed up from programming will be used to finalize the artistic, administrative and board succession plans and to launch implementation of it by June of 2013.

## 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fundraiser

Penumbra leveraged its 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with a record-setting fundraiser held May 11, 2012. The event netted over \$100,000 through sponsorships, ticket sales and auctions – a 170% increase over the FY11 fundraiser. Over 200 people attended a special presentation that revisited some of Penumbra's greatest moments on and off the stage.

The Scenic Shop continued to build sets for other theaters and generated over \$40,000 in net revenue for the theater. These jobs include a pro-rated cost for overhead and administrative expenses.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### University of Minnesota

Lou Bellamy's retirement from his position as professor at the University of Minnesota Theater, Arts and Dance Department has generated a desire by the University to build a legacy program around his contributions to the field. The three primary areas of focus for development are:

- Fully fund the August Wilson Fellowship and the Bellamy-Free Scholarship programs.
- A program that provides matriculating credit to undergraduates, graduates and faculty who work at Penumbra similar to the program with the Guthrie and Children's Theatre.
- A track within the Theater, Arts and Dance Department for Black Theater.

This is a long process and both organizations are committed to developing these opportunities.

### Johnson C. Smith University

Located in Charlotte, North Carolina, this university has invited Penumbra to help it engage the local black community in dialogue around issues of racism and social change. Activities would include theatrical presentations, community workshops and the creation of a Penumbra Summer Institute for local high school students. The Knight Foundation has expressed interest in supporting this endeavor.

### Board Development

In FY12, the board continued to identify and cultivate future membership of senior management with strong professional/personal networks, expertise in various fields, and, higher minimum financial commitments. The board also identified the need to cultivate prospective board members a year or two prior to recruitment to maximize their effectiveness and readiness to serve at the start of the term. The members approved plans to an incremental increase annually through FY16.

## PENUMBRA SUMMER INSTITUTE 2011 OVERVIEW

**Summer Institute (SI)** is a 3-year arts education and leadership training program for students, ages 13-18, to develop critical thinking and communication skills that they can use to challenge ideas and build community. First year introduces the concept of art for social change and basic theater craft, history and literature. Second year delves deeper into the craft and a particular social justice issue. Third year immerses students in frontline advocacy work while developing their social change projects. The primary issues addressed in the program are:

Identity Development and Awareness. Choosing a role model is one of the most powerful decisions for teens of color. However, the media regularly depicts negative stereotypes. At SI, teens explore their perspectives, cultural heritages and values with respect and care. They deconstruct toxic, self-destructive social and media messages and combat the pressure to "fit in." They learn to acknowledge and celebrate difference. They are emboldened to share their experiences, even if it challenges traditional power structures.

Political Beliefs and Advocacy. Teenagers do not have the right to vote and therefore assume their voice and opinions have little impact. SI creates a space where teens can engage in critical dialogue and constructively challenge the status quo. SI introduces grassroots organizing. The curriculum presents material for consideration and students are empowered to articulate their perspectives and take a position.

Responsibility for Self. By creating and performing a play, students are asked to think about every step, from what they are saying to how they are saying it, but most importantly why they are saying it. Students realize that the stage is a platform for voice and one that must be earned with careful study and consideration of potential impact. They learn to be responsible for their thoughts, words and actions; to view themselves as powerful agents in their own artistry and education, taking ownership and authorship over the knowledge they acquire.



**Summer Institute 2011 Class**

### **Highlights of Program Outcomes for Summer Institute 2011**

- Summer Institute ran 4 weeks, from July 5, 2011 to August 1, 2011.
- Participants were junior and senior high school students, aged 13 to 18.
- 36 recruitment workshops were done with 28 educators in 19 schools reaching about 900 students.
- 59 students applied from 34 different schools.
- 26 students graduated - 21 in the beginning track, 5 in the advanced track from 20 different schools.
- 10 students paid full tuition.
- 9 students received full tuition scholarships; 7 received partial scholarships.
- 14 professional artists taught 15 classes.
- 23 days of study were completed over 4 weeks.
- Students received 171 hours of total contact time with professional artists.
- 3 weeks of classes were held on the University of Minnesota campus.
- 1 week of classes and the final performances before a live audience took place at Penumbra.
- In the newly redesigned three-year leadership program, the 2011 class were year one students and therefore were not required to complete social change projects; they will address this in year three, 2013.

**Recruitment:** Recruitment was done through Art for Social Change Workshops led by skilled facilitators. Penumbra worked with 28 educators to complete 36 classroom workshops in 19 public and private junior high and high schools in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area.

**Admission:** First year students were required to submit a written application including an essay. All names were removed from the applications and selection was based on their interest in socially responsible art and demonstrated leadership. Penumbra deliberately recruits a diverse body of students, representing a range of ages, ethnicity, interest and experience to promote cross learning and mentoring. Mentorship is imperative in the creation of socially responsible art, as the students must learn how to lead and follow one another in order to become a community focused on making change. Summer Institute strives to reach and make room for students of all economic backgrounds, and provides scholarships as needed.

In addition to the written application, second year students were required to audition.

A total of 59 students from 34 different schools applied. Initially, 27 students were enrolled, 22 first year students and 5 second year students. However, one first year student left the program due to a terminal illness in the immediate family. 26 students graduated – 21 first year and 5 second year.

**Tuition:** Tuition for Summer Institute is \$400. Of the 26 students, 9 were given full scholarships and 7 were given partial scholarships. Generally, 60% of enrolled students require financial support.

**Instructors:** 14 professional artists were retained as course instructors. All have established careers, extensive backgrounds and teaching experience in their field of study. Some are long-time members of Penumbra Theatre and have taught at Summer Institute often. They were exemplary teachers, mentors and professional contacts for the students.

**Interns:** 3 interns were recruited, one of which was a Summer Institute alum, and all were college undergraduates. They provided valuable mentorship and reinforced a commitment to higher education. They had a teaching component, provided a level of maturity and achievement while demonstrating inquiry, preparedness, risk-taking and compassionate critique to which students aspired to attain.

**Course Offerings:** Classes were held Monday through Friday, providing 7.5 hours of daily class time. A total of 13 classes were offered: Acting I and II, African-based Movement I and II, Art with Intent, Improvisation, Music Element I and II, Performance Element I and II, Scene Work I and II, and Writing Lab.

Special Features of Summer Institute 2011 included:

- **Pre-college experience:** 3 weeks of classes were held at the University of Minnesota to encourage students' college plans and eliminate barriers. Students also toured the campus and the culturally rich West Bank.
- **Overnight dorm stay:** Students stayed at Middlebrook Hall and visited Coffman Memorial Union. This opportunity served as a bonding experience and gave them a glimpse of college life.
- **Youth Artist Retreat Day:** Students explored life as a working artist with a panel of industry experts; created resumes; and had professional photos taken. Students also spoke with a Social Change panel comprised of representatives from advocacy and service organizations from across the Minneapolis/St. Paul area which have expertise in social justice, equity building, and wellness. Organizations included 180 Degrees, Minnesota Second Chance Coalition, The Emily Program, Fairview Health Services, OutFront Minnesota, Women's Foundation of Minnesota, and World Without Genocide. Afterward, students broke into groups and rotated based on their interest in informal dialogue with the representatives.
- **Additional features:** Students received a metro transit bus pass for the 4-week program. All lunches and snacks were provided free of charge.
- **Live Performance:** Throughout the coursework, students performed improvisational acting games from their study of ensemble technique, scene work and other elements of theater. The developing work was molded into scripted scenes, rehearsed with a director, and culminated in a final performance before a live audience on Penumbra's professional stage. On July 30<sup>th</sup>, the first year students graduated and performed; on July 31<sup>st</sup>, the second year students graduated and performed; and on August 1<sup>st</sup>, both tracks performed in a special presentation to which the public was invited.

**Social Change Projects:** In the newly redesigned three-year leadership program, the 2011 class were year one students and therefore were not required to complete social change projects; they will address this in year three, 2013. However, from 2008 through 2010, each graduating class was challenged to apply their knowledge and passion in their own communities by addressing an issue that concerned them. In three years, over 20 such projects have been completed ranging from addressing racial profiling in an entire school district to the creation of a computer loan program for students of low income families. For some graduates, these projects have expanded into a multi-year exploration.

**Program Evaluation:** In 2008, Penumbra hired the consulting firm Side by Side to provide long-term analysis and data on the impact of the program on students, as well as the impact of their social change projects in the community. The firm designed surveys and led focus groups for extensive feedback. Audience members, students, instructors and parents participated in group discussions and surveys. In 2010, staff used the same tools to conduct surveys and lead focus groups with students, parents and audiences. Evaluation time was built into the 2011 SI Calendar, which increased participation to 71% (up from 62% in 2009). A total 18 students and 14 parents gave verbal feedback in recorded focus group sessions.

**Student Feedback:** After participating in SI, students reported increased confidence, and sharpened artistic and analytical skills. They felt greater respect from peers, and greater capability to engage frank conversations about topics of racism and discrimination that are rarely broached in school. They formed relationships that are deep and life changing.

- **Improvement:** In 3 key areas, 94% of 2011 students reported improvements.
  - They are better at fundamental performance skills: Changes were made to course structure to achieve greater synthesis and build appropriate foundations for skills acquisition between the first year and second year coursework. Instructors for each track were evaluated and changes made.
  - They are better critical thinkers: Curricular goals were refined to advance critical thinking skills. Arc of Theatre and Political Theatre were eliminated to allow greater clarity for the Art with Intent and Seminar courses.
  - Summer Institute provided a safe space for the exploration of new ideas: To support the emotional challenge of discussions of race and discrimination, the staff suspended course work when necessary to make space for facilitated discussion by Sarah Bellamy, Associate Artistic Director - Education. Students reported feeling safe being honest, and that staff took their opinions seriously.
- **Challenges:** In 2011 91% of students reported that they are more confident in facilitating dialogue about race, and also that they know more about the contributions of African Americans to the practice of art for social change. It is essential that students feel confident facilitating dialogue about race and racism and have knowledge of progress achieved by professional activist artists. Additional funding is needed to provide more facilitated race discussions for both parents and students. Penumbra's acclaimed RACE Workshop would provide a useful model. Additional guest artists would demonstrate a broad range of the practice of art for social change. Many of these artists are working throughout the United States and would require travel and lodging in addition to honoraria.

**Parent Feedback:** Parents reported that students gained performance skills, confidence, motivation, awareness, and a deeper engagement with their education. They shared praise for the depth and quality of the final performances and were generally enthusiastic about an ongoing relationship with Penumbra Theatre, requesting more opportunities for parental involvement both during the summer and throughout the school year. Plans are being developed to include more opportunities for parents to learn alongside their children. Paul Slack shared the following about his son's experience: *"I have not found any other program that allows students to express themselves and see themselves as a gift in the way that Penumbra's Summer Institute does. Students emerge with a greater sense of confidence, and are equipped with tools and skills that will serve them well not only in theatre but in every aspect of their lives. They learn to relate as partners, in relationship to one another, their communities and the world."*

**Audience Feedback:** Audience members remarked on the honesty and seriousness of the students, their maturity for the subject matter, and the amount of work the final performances represented. They noted their appreciation for learning something new and relevant. One respondent wrote: *"More theatre needs to be like what I saw tonight: real, honest and courageous."*

The Surdna Foundation of New York City has supported the growth of this program for the last three years and has committed to another three years (2011-2013, total \$180,000). Other major funders include General Mills Communities of Color, Xcel Energy, Best Buy, May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust, Medtronic, Compas United Arts Fund, and RBC Foundation.