

# **Penumbra Theatre Company**

## **History, Mission, RACE Workshop, and Artist and Facilitator Bios**

### **July 2020**

---

#### **MISSION**

Penumbra Theatre creates professional productions that are artistically excellent, thought provoking, and relevant and illuminates the human condition through the prism of the African American experience.

Penumbra's goals are:

To increase public awareness of the significant contributions of African Americans in creating a diversified American theatrical tradition.

To encourage and facilitate a culturally diverse and all-inclusive America by using theatre to teach, criticize, comment and model.

To use theatre to create an American mythology that includes African Americans and other peoples of color in every thread of the fabric of our society.

To continue to maintain and stabilize a black performing arts community.

#### **HISTORY**

The Penumbra Theatre was founded in 1976 by Artistic Director Lou Bellamy to create a forum for African-American voices in the Twin Cities' well-respected theater community. Through its commitment to provide realistic, inspirational works that redefine the consciousness of its audience, the Penumbra quickly garnered praise and a loyal following.

Over the years that followed, Penumbra Theatre Company lived up to its mission of presenting artistically excellent productions that depict emotional, relevant, and valuable experiences from an African American perspective. It has achieved national recognition for its quality productions and leadership role in launching the career of many respected playwrights, including two-time Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson.

As Penumbra has grown, so has our impact on the community. In addition to performing before 40,000 people of all backgrounds every year, our Educational and Outreach activities impact more than 5,000 students each year. We employ more actors, choreographers, dancers, directors, and administrators of color than all other theatres in Minnesota combined.

Penumbra remains an active member of the Selby/Dale neighborhood and surrounding community. By maintaining a strong physical link to our environment, Penumbra fulfills one of its main objectives: to serve as an educator, employer and inspirational model for the community whose stories we tell.

Our role was recognized in January of 2000, when Danny Glover presented us with the Jujamcyn Award in New York City. As a recipient of the national award for the development of artistic talent, we join an exclusive list of top regional theaters that includes the Yale Repertory Theater and The Mark Taper Forum. Penumbra has also been named "Best Theatre for Drama" by City Pages and "One of Ten Companies that Make a Difference" by Stage Directions Magazine.

Today, Penumbra Theatre Company is Minnesota's only professional African American theatre, and is one of only three professional African American theaters in the nation to offer a full season of performances. Under Bellamy's quarter century of continuous leadership, Penumbra has stayed on the cutting edge of the national theatre scene and continues to present groundbreaking productions.

### **Virtual RACE Workshops**

Diverse organizations across the country approach Penumbra Theatre Company each year to encourage dialogue and engagement around the issues of race and equity. Penumbra's RACE Workshop combines expert facilitation, a powerful exploration of race in America, monologues from artists, and opportunities for participants to use theatre as a way to problem-solve and model. The process celebrates difference, recognizes cultural nuance, and invites everyone to participate in the dialogue. We customize each workshop to fit the needs of our clients. Penumbra's programming is rigorous and immersive. Penumbra appreciates the opportunity to build deep, ongoing relationships with organizations that value diversity, inclusion, and equity. As a result of attending the RACE Workshop, participants:

**LEARN.** Explore how race, gender, class and other identity markers shape our opportunities, success, safety and circumstances.

**REFLECT.** Become more aware of how our intersectional identities determine how we see the world and how the world sees us.

**ACT.** Practice intervening in oppressive behaviors as they happen.

For questions or to learn more, contact Vanessa Nyarko, Education Manager, at [vanessa.nyarko@penumbratheatre.org](mailto:vanessa.nyarko@penumbratheatre.org) or 651.288.7790, or complete the following survey below:

### **FACILITATORS AND ARTISTS**



**Sarah Bellamy, Creator, Lead Facilitator.** Sarah is the Artistic Director for Penumbra Theatre Company. She has designed several programs that engage patrons in critical thinking, dialogue, and action around issues of race and social justice. Select programs include Penumbra's RACE Workshop and the Summer Institute, a leadership development program for teens to practice art for social change. A graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, Ms. Bellamy also holds an M.A. in the Humanities from the University of Chicago. She has taught at Macalester College, the University of Minnesota, and served as Visiting Professor of Theatre and Culture at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. Bellamy is a leading facilitator around issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion and has led coalition building efforts to address inequities in philanthropy and theatre. Her lectures on the power of race and representation have been presented across the country illuminating the ways in which images, narratives, and media influence perception and ultimately shape lives. She has been awarded the Hubert H. Humphrey Public Leadership Award and serves on the Board of Directors for The Jerome Foundation, and was a 2015 Bush Fellow.



**Adlyn Carreras, Monologist and Teaching Artist.** Adlyn was born and raised in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She studied at Macalester College and the University of Minnesota with majors in International Studies and Latin American literature. She has performed for various theaters including: The Jungle Theater, Park Square, Mixed Blood, Pangea World Theater, Teatro del Pueblo, and LoudMouth Collective. Adlyn is an Adjunct Professor at Augsburg University, a teaching artist for the Neighborhood Bridges Program at Children's Theater Company, and a performing artist for the Race Workshop at Penumbra Theater. She is currently developing her one-woman show *If My Bones Could Speak*.



**Sun Mee Chomet, Facilitator, Teaching Artist and Monologist.** Sun Mee is a St. Paul-based actor and playwright. She has worked with Lincoln Center Theater (*brownsville song: b-side for tray*); Penumbra Theatre (*for colored girls...*); Guthrie Theater (*As You Like It, King Lear, Harvey, The Burial at Thebes, The Intelligent Homosexual...*); Broadway tour of Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*; Syracuse Stage (*M. Butterfly*); Mu Performing Arts, and Ten Thousand Things Theater, among others. Sun Mee's recognition includes two 2018 MN Theater Awards, two 2017 Ivey Awards, 2017 Bloggers' Award for Best Comedic Performance (*Vietgone*); 2015 Lucille Lortel nomination (*brownsville song*); 2019 PWC's McKnight Theater Artist Fellowship, Star Tribune's 'Best of' lists for *The Origin(s) Project* (2012) and *Asiamnesia* (2007); "2012 Best Solo Performance" honors for her play, *How to Be a Korean Woman* (*Lavender Magazine*), and one of City Pages' 2008 Artists of the Year.



**Darius Dotch, Monologist.** Darius is an Ivey Award winning actor who has starred in plays at Penumbra Theatre including *Detroit' 67* and most recently *Pipeline*. He made his debut at Jungle Theatre in *Bars and Measures* by Idris Goodwin, starring in the role of Eric. Other notable performances include the role of Harpo in Park Square Theatre's production of *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, Mixed Blood Theatre's *Colossal* by Andrew Hinderaker and *Marcus or the Secret of Sweet* by Tarell Alvin McCraney for Pillsbury House Theatre (Ivey Award for Best Ensemble), *A Civil War Christmas* by Paula Vogel, and *The Lombardi* by Eric Simonson, both at the History Theatre.



**Haseena Hamzawala, Facilitator.** Haseena has been an educator for 20 years in a plethora of roles, including teaching English Literature at both public and private high schools, leading outdoor experiential education trips in the Utah Canyonlands, teaching educators and undergraduate students in the Philippines as a Peace Corps volunteer, as a GED program facilitator with adjudicated youth in Hennepin County, and in an administrative position as an equity specialist in a large Minnesota school district. Her background in English Education, Curriculum and Instruction, and Educational Equity and Social Justice have led her to work with students of all ages and backgrounds. After teaching high school English - including American Literature, Literature of Resistance, and Writing Seminar - Haseena has

recently moved on from St. Paul Academy after 13 years and has returned to her social justice roots as a consultant for deep educational equity and racial justice work. She currently facilitates discussions on Critical Race Theory and equitable and socially just curriculum development.



**Jay Owen Eisenberg, Facilitator Monologist and Teaching Artist.** Jay is an actor, writer and arts educator. He is a teaching artist with the Guthrie Theater and Children's Theatre Company, and a frequent collaborator with Pillsbury House + Theatre (*≈[almost equal to]*, *Breaking Ice*, *Chicago Avenue Project*) and Mixed Blood Theatre (*On Our Own Terms*, *Charm*, *HIR*), where he also serves as the Transgender Community Organizer. Jay has recently worked with Open Eye Figure Theatre on *Constance in the Darkness*, as well as his solo show, *BIG OLD ROCK*. He is the recipient of a 2018 A.R.T. Residency, a 2017 MSAB Artist

Initiative Grant, and a 2016 SPACE on Ryder Farm Residency. BFA, Drama: NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Experimental Theatre Wing. AEA/SAG-AFTRA.



**JuCoby Johnson, Facilitator and Monologist.** JuCoby is an actor, playwright and teaching artist here in the Twin Cities. His work as a teaching artist includes workshops with Penumbra Theatre and Park Square Theater. Acting credits include: *Noises Off* and *Bad News! i was there...*(Guthrie Theater); *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* and *The Nether* (Jungle Theater); *To Let Go and Fall* and *Six Degrees of Separation* (Theater Latte Da); *Actually* and *The Whipping Man* (MN Jewish Theater); *Pericles* and *Dear World* (Ten Thousand Things); and many more. His play, *How It's Gon' Be*, had its world premiere in May 2019 with Underdog Theater.



**Michelle De Joya, Monologist.**

Michelle is a local actor/ dancer/acrobat/ yoga instructor in the Twin Cities and a 2017 graduate from the University of Minnesota Guthrie Theater BFA Actor Training Program, as well as a 2013 graduate from The South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities. Some of her past productions include: Minnesota Opera: *The Fix*; The Jungle Theater: *The Wolves*; Park Square Theatre: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Artistry: *Mary Poppins*; Red Bird Theatre: *Time to Burn*; Theater Mu: *Flower Drum Song*, *Tot: The Untold* (Yet Spectacular) *Story of a Filipino Hulk Hogan*; Sandbox Theater Company: *Houdini*, *600 Years*. Her upcoming projects include: *Flying Foot Forum: Heaven*; Theatre Latte Da:

Chicago; Park Square Theatre: Un.



**George Keller, Monologist and Teaching Artist.** George is an actress from the Twin Cities. She is a member of Actors Equity and has performed at Penumbra Theatre, Guthrie Theater, Mixed Blood Theater, Brave New Workshop, Hey City Theater, Pillsbury House Theater, Children's Theatre Company, Park Square Theatre and The Jungle Theater. Movie and television credits include Halloweentown for the Disney Channel, Into Temptation (independent wide release), and Lady Dynamite for Netflix. She is very passionate about improvisational theater and teaches improvisation every summer for Penumbra's Summer Institute program.



**Meghan Kriedler, Monologist and Teaching Artist.** Meghan is a Minneapolis based actor and musician. She has acted on local and national stages with the Guthrie Theater, Mixed Blood Theater, Theater Mu, Children's Theatre Company, Park Square Theater, Theatre Latte Da, History Theatre, CLIMB Theatre, and the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego. Meghan has been a Race Workshop Monologue Artist with Penumbra Theatre since 2013. She is a recipient of the 2017 Ivey Awards for Emerging Artist and Ensemble in Mixed Blood Theatre's production of "Vietgone" by Qui Nguyen. In 2017 she was also awarded Artist of the Year by City Pages. She fronts local rock 'n' roll band Kiss the Tiger, having opened for prominent acts such as The Suburbs, Black Joe Lewis, and Jackie Venson. City Pages named Kriedler with "Best Stage Style" (Kiss the Tiger) in their 2019 "Best

Of" issue. City Pages named Kiss the Tiger one of ten bands "Poised to Pop" in 2019.



**Theo Langason, Facilitator, Teaching Artist and Monologist.** Theo was born and raised in Northeast Minneapolis, Theo Langason is a graduate of Rutgers University where he studied Theatre Arts. Since moving back to Minneapolis, Theo has worked with Park Square Theatre, Frank Theatre, Theatre Pro Rata, The Mysterium, Red Eye Theatre and The Winding Sheet Outfit. Theo is a lead teaching artist with Penumbra Theatre Company facilitating residencies and teaching in the Summer Institute. Theo is also a member of Blackout Improv group.



**Isabella Star La Blanc, Monologist.** Isabella is a Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota actress, writer and storyteller. Born and raised in the Twin Cities, Isabella found theater as a child and has been working on Minnesota stages for over a decade. She's been seen at the Children's Theatre Company (Peter Pan); The Guthrie Theater (Stories from the Drum); The Jungle Theater (The Wolves, Little Women); Minnesota History Theater (Tales Along the Minnesota Trail); and Mixed Blood Theatre (Autonomy) among others. Outside of Minnesota, Isabella has worked in Portland, Los Angeles, Cincinnati (Cincinnati Shakespeare Company) and Syracuse (Syracuse Stage). On screen, Isabella was recently seen in Missy Whiteman's "Coyote Way: Going Back Home" courtesy

of the Sundance Native Film Lab. In December of 2016, she was one of twelve selected from 10,000 applicants for the Inaugural CBS Drama Diversity Casting Initiative. As a writer, Isabella's work has been performed at the Penumbra Theater Company and Pangea World Theater. Her script "Writing A War Novel" was a finalist for the 2017 Yale Young Native Storytellers Festival. Her piece "Proposed

Adjustments to American History Curriculum" was featured in The Minnesota Women's Press, August 2018 issue.



**John Middleton, Monologist.** John has acted with companies throughout the Twin Cities including the Jungle Theater, Torch Theater, Park Square, Girl Friday Productions, Theatre Pro Rata, Gremlin, Sandbox Theater, Carlyle Brown and Company, Theater Latté Da, and Frank Theater. As a writer, his plays have been performed at Lyric Arts Main Street Stage, the Minnesota Fringe Festival, Torch Theater, and (in May 2020) Theatre in the Round.



**Nora Montañez, Monologist.** Nora is a Minneapolis-based, Peruvian-born actress, singer, educator, playwright and community advocate. Nora was raised in Paterson, NJ and holds a BFA from Florida Atlantic University. In Minneapolis Nora has worked with The Guthrie Theater, Children's Theatre Company, Jungle Theater, Park Square Theater, The Playwrights' Center, Mu Performing Arts, Mixed Blood Theatre, and many others. In Chicago, Nora has worked with Congo Square, Chicago Dramatist, The Revival, Something Marvelous, Teatro Vista and Court Theatre. Nora is a Breaking Ice Company Member with Pillsbury House Theatre, a teaching artist with Interact Center as well as a board member for Theater 45°. She was a 2018 Next Step Grant recipient as well as an Artist in Resident with Catalyst Arts and Center for the Performing Arts. Nora is the

Founder of the Alliance of Latinx Minnesota Artists (ALMA), which facilitates alliances among the spectrum of Minnesotan Latinx artists.



**Am'Ber Montgomery, Monologist and Teaching Artist.** Am'Ber is an actor and teaching artist from Detroit, Michigan. Locally Am'Ber has worked at Steppingstone Theater, Pillsbury House Theater, Park Square Theater, Phoenix Theater, The Jungle Theater and is part of Penumbra Theatre's teaching artist and RACE Workshop team. She is currently a Fellow at Steppenwolf Theatre Company in Chicago. Am'Ber received her BFA from the University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater Actor Training Program.



**Audrey Park, Facilitator, Monologist and Teaching Artist.** Audrey is an actor and community organizer residing in Minneapolis, MN. As a committed and passionate artist and activist, she was a strong voice in the Don't Buy Miss Saigon Coalition and serves on the steering committee of PAVE-MN (Pan Asian Voices for Equity). As an actor, she has performed with Ten Thousand Things, Theater Mu, Frank Theatre, Pillsbury House Theatre, History Theatre, San Diego Rep, Park Square Theatre, Yellow Tree Theatre, and with Penumbra Theatre in its production of for colored girls. As a teaching artist, Audrey facilitates workshops with Penumbra Theatre and Theater Mu. She enjoys

planning events for the community, coordinating the popular summer street festival, Little Mekong

Night Market in St. Paul from 2015-2016. Audrey sees art as a strong tool for social justice and is committed to working with people to effect social change on a local level. *"You cannot change any society unless you take responsibility for it. Unless you see yourself as belonging to it and responsible for changing it."* - Grace Lee Boggs



**Mikell Sapp, Monologist.** Mikell is Minnesota's 2015 Ivey Award winner for Emerging Artist from Phenix City, AL and a proud graduate of Alabama State University. He started his professional career at Pillsbury House Theatre (MN) performing in *Broke-Ology* in 2011. Since then, he has worked at numerous theaters around the Twin Cities. He has performed in: *Pussy Valley* (Mixed Blood Theatre), *The Snowy Day* (Children's Theatre Company), *Electra* (Ten Thousand Things

Theater), *A Crack in the Sky* (History Theatre), *Marcus; or The Secret of Sweet* (Guthrie), *The Ballad of Emmett Till* and *Spunk* (Penumbra Theatre).



**Eric Sharp, Facilitator and Monologist.** Eric is an actor, playwright, and teaching artist based in Minneapolis. He has appeared onstage nationally and internationally at the Guthrie Theater, Ten Thousand Things, Atlanta's Alliance Theatre, as well as the Toronto and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals. Eric played Mowgli in Children's Theatre Company's new adaptation of *The Jungle Book*, and the young Dalai Lama on multiple tours of TigerLion Arts' *The Buddha Prince*. A regular performer at Theater Mu, Eric has appeared in *Hot Asian Doctor Husband*, *Two Mile Hollow*, *Twelfth Night* and many others. He also wrote and starred in the 2014 Mu world premiere of *Middle Brother*. He directs and teaches for the Mu Training Institute, COMPAS, and has facilitated

Penumbra's RACE Workshop since 2016.



**May Lee-Yang, Monologist and Teaching Artist.** May is a writer, performance artist, and teacher. Her theater-based works include *The Korean Drama Addict's Guide to Losing Your Virginity*, *Confessions of a Lazy Hmong Woman*, and others. She is a former Playwright Center McKnight Fellow, and her work has been supported by the Jerome Foundation, the National Performance Network, the Bush Leadership Fellowship, the MN State Arts Board, the Loft Literary Center, and the

Metropolitan Regional Arts Council. In 2016, she received an Ordway Sally Award for Arts Access. She has taught creative writing and theater through COMPAS, the University of Minnesota, and the public libraries. Additionally, she is a founding member of F.A.W.K. (Funny Asian Women Collective), a group that uses comedy to combat the invisibility and dehumanization of Asian women's stories.