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HowlRound.com presents the series:
STATE OF BLACK THEATER
MARCH 10-16, 2013

**Featuring articles from Black Theatre Network, The Ensemble Theatre,
The Hansberry Project, MPAACT Theatre, National Black Theatre, Penumbra Theatre, &
The Robey Theatre Company.**

NEW YORK, NY Monday, February 18, 2013-- From March 10-16, 2013 HowlRound.com will publish a week-long series of articles from leading African American theater organizations and practitioners from across the country on the STATE OF BLACK THEATER in America. On Thursday, March 14 from 2-3pm EST, curator Jonathan McCrory will host a twitter session with participating organizations and practitioners using #newplay.

The HowlRound series will give a snapshot of what is happening within Black Theater across the country and asks practitioners to address hard questions and spark dialogue around the challenges and opportunities facing the field.

“Black Theatre is at a cross-roads and I think it is important that something be done to bring awareness to this critical moment. This week is an invitation to interact with these amazing innovative organizations that only represent a fraction of the African American Institutions in America and what better platform to do it on than Howlround. Please leave comments, challenge us to think deeper, and help to uplift the Black Theatre community” says curator Jonathan McCrory.

The series will include articles by:

Ben Guillory, Producing Artistic Director, The Robey Theatre Company, Los Angeles, CA
Carla Stilwell, Managing Producer, MPAACT Theatre, Chicago, IL
Edris Cooper-Anifowoshe, Director and Producer, San Francisco, CA
Eileen J. Morris, Artistic Director, The Ensemble Theatre, Houston, TX
Michael Dinwiddie, President, Black Theatre Network
Sade Lythcott, CEO, The National Black Theatre Inc., New York, NY
Sarah Bellamy, Associate Artistic Director, Penumbra Theatre, Saint Paul, MN
Talvin Wilks, Director and Scholar, New York, NY
Valerie Curtis-Newton, Artistic Director, The Hansberry Project, Seattle, WA

Featured Interview with:

Ron Simons, Founder President, SimonSays Entertainment, New York, NY

“HowlRound is delighted to shine a light on the important conversations happening in the black theater community. Consistently we’re faced as a field with a lack of diversity in our storytelling, and yet there are so many committed artists out there working to change that. Our hope is to use our commons-based platforms to promote hard-hitting dialogue around what feel like intractable problems,” says Polly Carl, Editor, HowlRound.

HowlRound, housed at Emerson College, is committed to modeling a commons-based approach to advancing the health and impact of the not-for-profit theater. HowlRound develops and designs platforms to *converse*, *convene*, *research*, and *teach*. By doing so, we strive to illuminate the breadth and diversity of the American theater—and in particular to encourage the telling of stories by new voices, from new angles, and about parts of our field that are not often chronicled. HowlRound’s aim is to encourage field-wide: increased sharing of resources, alignments and efficiencies to free more resources for theater makers and to minimize the cost of infrastructure, value-generation that’s not based solely in market transactions, reduced barriers to access and increased participation in the theater, and the creation of new tools and platforms by others.

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www.howlround.com

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS *[shown in Alphabetical order]*

BLACK THEATRE NETWORK's ongoing drive is to COLLECT, PROCESS and DISTRIBUTE information that supports the professional and personal development of its members and therefore nurtures the growth of Black Theatre. To meet its goals, BTN has developed programs that target specific sectors of its constituency while operating under the conviction that we are all in this continuum together; and therefore we are to help each other. The network provides a development of excellence and the growth of new visionary theatre professionals through its student design and writing competitions. Through its Recognition Awards, BTN acknowledges exceptional accomplishments and participation in workshops designed to help others develop skills specific to Black Theatre.

[<http://www.blacktheatrenetwork.org>]

THE ENSEMBLE THEATRE was founded in 1976 by the late George Hawkins to preserve African American artistic expression and enlighten, entertain and enrich a diverse community. Over thirty years later, the theatre has evolved from a touring company operating from the trunk of Mr. Hawkins' car to being one of Houston's finest historical cultural institutions. The Ensemble is one of the only professional theatres in the region dedicated to the production of works portraying the African American experience, the oldest and largest professional African American theatre in the Southwest, and holds the distinction of being one of the nation's largest African American theatres owning and operating its facility and producing in-house. The Ensemble Theatre has fulfilled and surpassed the vision of its founder, and continues to expand and create innovative programs to bring African American theatre to a myriad of audiences.

[<http://www.ensemblehouston.com>]

THE HANSBERRY PROJECT is a professional theatre laboratory dedicated to the artistic exploration of African American life, history and culture. From initial sketches to fully-realized productions, the Hansberry Project promotes and supports black theatre artists of diverse interests and disciplines, speaking on a range of themes and working in a variety of styles. HP presents the work of black artists because it is committed to the idea of an American Theatre that more accurately reflects of the richness and diversity of American life. Its ultimate vision is a wider community in which the voices of black theatre artists – artfully expressing their observations, investigations, hopes and dreams - are an integral part of a rich, full-throated civic conversation..

[<http://hansberryproject.org>]

MPAACT exists to develop, nurture, and sustain Afrikan Centered Theatre (ACT), an artistic expression grounded in the many cultures and traditions of the Afrikan continent and its Diaspora. With a vision focused on creating new work and collaborative art, MPAACT produces and educates with the goal of increasing understanding and appreciation of (ACT) and its interrelated disciplines.

[<http://www.mpaact.org/>]

PENUMBRA THEATRE was founded in 1976 by Lou Bellamy to create a forum for African American artists and to make art that advances social goals around issues of race, equity, and justice. Penumbra has achieved national recognition for high quality productions, effective educational programs, and launching the career of many respected playwrights, including two-time Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson. Penumbra has offered 36 continuous seasons presenting over 156 plays, including 34 world premieres

Penumbra's mission is to create professional productions that are artistically excellent, thought provoking, relevant, and illuminate the human condition through the prism of the African American experience.

[<http://penumbraatheatre.org>]

THE ROBEY THEATRE COMPANY was founded in 1994 to offer an exceptional standard of theatre training, playwrighting workshops, readings, productions and to create opportunities for Black theatre artists. Artists of color and particularly Black playwrights have lacked a forum where their work can be developed in collaboration with their peers. Moreover, audiences have had insufficient opportunities to hear these voices and experience their unique expression of culture. Robey was founded to help satisfy those needs. While maintaining a concentration on the Black

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Aesthetic and Black Experience, the company has also produced multicultural projects, collaborating with other cultural communities (Asian, Jewish, rural and urban White, Latino, and Native American) building bridges and recognizing and celebrating the diversity that exists within the Black community itself. Robey's award-winning programs nurture creativity, offer training, and provide entertainment for playwrights, actors, and audiences.

Robey's mission is to explore, develop, and produce new plays written by, for or about the Black experience and reinterpret established work.

[\[http://www.robeytheatrecompany.com\]](http://www.robeytheatrecompany.com)

NATIONAL BLACK THEATRE Founded by visionary Dr. Barbara Ann Teer in 1968, the National Black Theatre (NBT) has pioneered "the healing art of black theatre as an instrument for wholeness in urban communities where entrepreneurial artists of African descent live and work." NBT's own original productions have toured the USA, Caribbean, Central America, Africa, Asia and has performed in venues throughout New York City, such as The Apollo Theatre, Lincoln Center and the Beacon Theatre. NBT performances attract audiences of over 90,000 each year, more than any other African--American community based Theatre company in NYC. To date, NBT has won over 45 AUDELCO Black Theatre Excellence Awards, produced over 300 productions, and countless workshops, courses and community events.

[\[www.nationalblacktheatre.org\]](http://www.nationalblacktheatre.org)

PARTICIPATING PRACTITIONERS *[shown in Alphabetical order]*

EDRIS COOPER-ANIFOWOSHE is an award-winning director, actor and writer. She has directed at Trinity Rep, Magic Theatre, TheatreWorks, WaterTower Theatre/Dallas, Mark Taper Forum, Southern Rep in New Orleans and Alabama Shakespeare, among others. A one-time performer with the San Francisco Mime Troupe Edris has performed at many regional and independent theaters and for more than a decade was a lead artist for Rhodessa Jones' *The Medea Project; Theatre for Incarcerated Women*. Edris' original solo performances have been seen at Northwestern University, the University of Illinois and the University of Florida in Gainesville in San Francisco at AfroSolo Festival, Intersection For the Arts and other small independent venues, including her own Sugar Shack Performance Gallery and Cultural Center in the Lower Haight (1991-1993). Internationally, Edris has performed in Ibadan, Nigeria and Berlin, Germany and presented scholarship on performance in Mexico, the UK and the Netherlands. Her 2010 performance of *Adventures of A Black Girl In Search of Academic Clarity and Inclusion* was presented as part of the solo/black/women festival at Northwestern University, is being created as a video game and will be published in an anthology by Northwestern University Press later this year.

RON SIMONS Mr. Simons is a Tony Award-winning producer and actor. He is founder and president of SimonSays Entertainment which produced the critically acclaimed films: *Night Catches Us* (starring Anthony Mackie and Kerry Washington), *Gun Hill Road* (starring Esai Morales and Judy Reyes), *Blue Caprice* (starring Isaiah Washington and Tequon Richmond) and *Ma George* (starring Isaach De Bankolé and Danai Gurira all premiering at the Sundance Film Festival). He also produced *Porgy & Bess* for which he won the Tony Award, the all-black Broadway revival of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and August Wilson's final Broadway play *Radio Golf*. The company's first feature film, *Night Catches Us*, was released nationwide by Magnolia Pictures in 2010 and is available on Netflix, Amazon.com and the Showtime network. The company's second feature *Gun Hill Road* was released nationwide in 2011 and will be available on DVD in the spring of 2013.

As an actor, Mr. Simons has appeared in TV shows such as *Law & Order*, *Law & Order Criminal Intent*, *As the World Turns* and *Nowhere Man* as well as in the films *27 Dresses*, *Mystery Team*, *Night Catches Us* and *Blue Caprice*. He won the prestigious London Stage Award for Acting Excellence for the play *Boy Steals Train* which he co-developed.

Mr. Simons' films have won numerous awards including the FIPRESCI Award for Best American Feature, 2010 Black Reel Awards - Best Film (*Night Catches Us*); IMAGEN Award - Best Film, National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts - Horizon Award, FINALIST- HUMANITAS Award - Best Sundance Film (*Gun Hill Road*); NOMINEE U.S. Grand Jury Prize: Dramatic – Sundance Film Festival (*Night Catches Us*, *Gun Hill Road*, *Mother of George*). His films have been official

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selections at prestigious film festivals such as Sundance Film Festival, New Directors / New Films, Los Angeles Film Festival, San Francisco Film Festival, the Seattle International Film Festival and the American Black Film Festival.

Mr. Simons' corporate and management experience includes several years as a Software Engineer developing Manufacturing Operating Systems at Hewlett-Packard and later, as a Knowledge Engineer, developing Artificial Intelligence systems for companies such as Chrysler Corporation, Morton Thiokol, General Motors and the Northrop Corporation. After earning his MBA, he joined Microsoft where he managed several multi-million dollar marketing businesses including Microsoft Mail, Microsoft LAN Manager and Microsoft's back office suite of products.

Mr. Simons is a recipient of the 2012 Tony Award (Best Revival of a Musical, *Porgy and Bess*), Heritage Award from Columbia College's Black Alumni Council, 150 Distinguished Alumni Award from University of Washington and is a Johnson & Johnson Leadership Award Fellow. He holds a BA from Columbia College, an MBA from Columbia Business School and an MFA from the University of Washington's Professional Actor Training Program. He has four children: Elise, Zora, Langston and Isaiah.

[<http://www.simonsaysentertainment.net>]

TALVIN WILKS is a playwright, director and dramaturg. His plays include *Tod, the boy*, *Tod, The Trial of Uncle S&M*, *Bread of Heaven*, and *An American Triptych*. Directorial projects include the world premiere productions of *UDU* by Sekou Sundiata (651Arts/BAM), *The Love Space Demands* by Ntozake Shange (Crossroads), *No Black Male Show/Pagan Operetta* by Carl Hancock Rux (Joe's Pub/The Kitchen), *Banana Beer Bath* by Lynn Nottage, (*Going to the River Festival*), the Obie Award/AUDELCO Award winning *The Shaneequa Chronicles* by Stephanie Berry (Ensemble Studio Theatre), *Relativity* by Cassandra Medley (Ensemble Studio Theatre – AUDELCO nomination for Best Director 2006), *On the Way to Timbuktu* by Petronia Paley (Ensemble Studio Theatre – AUDELCO nomination for Best Director 2008), and *Anne and Emmett* by Janet Langhart-Cohen (Atlas Theatre). He has served as co-writer/dramaturg for ten productions in Ping Chong's ongoing series of *Undesirable Elements*, and dramaturg for five collaborations with the Bebe Miller Company, *Going to the Wall*, the Bessie Award winning, *Verge, Landing/Place* for which he received a 2006 Bessie Award, *Necessary Beauty* and the currently touring *A History*. Recent dramaturgical collaborations also include work with Camille Brown and *Dancers (Mr. TOL E. RaNcE)*, *Carmen DeLavallade (My Life in Dance and Theatre and Legends I Met Along the Way)* and Ping Chong (*The Civil War Project*). He is currently writing a book on black theatre, *Testament: 40 Years of Black Theatre History in the Making, 1964-2004*, and recently curated *The Aunt Ester Cycle*, a theatre festival at the August Wilson Center for African American Culture in Pittsburgh, PA.