

Celebrating the artistic traditions of communities of African and African American ancestry

Written by

Monday, 03 February 2014 16:31



The Ordway Center for the Performing Arts announced the launch of "Taking Our Place Centerstage: The African Diaspora in Harmony." This special initiative offers enhanced programming that includes master classes and workshops, an art exhibition, social gatherings and cultural conversations to celebrate the rich artistic traditions of communities of African and African American ancestry. The surrounding events are designed to enrich the Ordway's 2013-2014 season of world-class performances by Rennie Harris Puremovement, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Maria de Barros, *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*, and Step Afrika!.

Also, in partnership with [Youthprise](#) and as part of their Black History Month Celebration 2014, the Ordway will host a reception before Maria de Barros' Feb. 19 performance honoring Naomi Tutu, an international speaker on race and gender justice and daughter of Desmond Tutu. Naomi Tutu will also give a special introduction for Maria de Barros.



As part of the programming, Ronald K. Brown, award-winning choreographer of *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*, will visit Saint Paul on Feb. 25 for a community reception at the Ordway and education programs at community schools.

The African Diaspora in Harmony program was planned by the Taking Our Place Centerstage (TOPC) Vision Council, whose members examined the opportunities surrounding each artistic performance. The Vision Council connected with community leaders, business leaders and media partners to curate this series of arts-based learning and engagement programs from January-June 2014 to increase cross-cultural understanding and promote the awareness of the vibrant Afro-centric cultural heritage in the Twin Cities.

"The African Diaspora in Harmony, managed by dancer and choreographer Leah Nelson, offers a wonderful opportunity to experience the work of African artists from around the world and the Twin Cities and to extend the art beyond the stage," said Robin Hickman, program director for

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TOPC and CEO of SoulTouch Productions. "The Ordway is walking with the community in presenting these experiences and performances. We are working together to create an exciting array of events that can open up minds and hearts."

The Ordway's TOPC program began in October 2010 in partnership with communities of African and African American ancestry. The initiative, led by Program Director Robin P. Hickman and Program Manager Leah Nelson, is committed to artistic, educational and economic engagement. TOPC Vision Council members are Mahmoud El Kati, Titilayo Bediako, Andrea Jenkins, Tom Gitaa, Nneka Onyilofo, Hawona Sullivan Janzen, Shegitu Kebede, Maria Isa Perez, Marcus Pope and Sherine Crooms Onukwuwe.

"We have such a creative and energetic team behind this program," said Patricia Mitchell, president and CEO of the Ordway. "Throughout this season, we are all on a journey that inspires, uplifts, and entertains – a journey made possible through artistic and education programming designed and executed in partnership with community leaders and artists."

The African Diaspora refers to the communities throughout the world that are descended from the historic movement of peoples from Africa, predominantly to the Americas, Europe and the Middle East, among other areas around the globe.

A complete listing of Taking Our Place Centerstage: The African Diaspora in Harmony programs and events follows.

AFRICAN DIASPORA IN HARMONY Program and Events

RENNIE HARRIS PUREMOVEMENT

Wednesday, February 5 | 6pm–7:30pm - Ordway Free Knowledge Sessions in B-boying and Funk Dances

Celebrate the legacy of b-boying and funk dances in Minnesota with leading practitioners in the community including Roosevelt Mansfield (aka DJ Digie) of Uprock with teachers Aneka Starlashay McMullen, Chevell Taylor (aka Trusoul), Madeline Howie (aka Madfresh), Dovan Kingsley (aka B-boy Drift).

Free and open to all ages. Pre-registration required.

Thursday, February 6 | 6:30pm–8pm - Ordway Master Class with Rennie Harris Puremovement

Experienced dancers can join Rennie Harris Puremovement dancers in a hip-hop explosion master class featuring social dances of the 80s, 90s and today. The studio is being made available free to dancers before and after (5:30pm-6:30pm & 8pm-9pm) so they can practice/session on their own. DJ Roosevelt Mansfield (aka DJ Digie).

\$10 Pre-registration is required.

Friday, February 7 | 6:30pm - Ordway

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Ordway Extra: Hip-hop Philosophy: A Way of Life

A conversation with multiple viewpoints from dancers, choreographers, teachers, artistic directors, and activists on how hip-hop culture plays a part in these artists lives: Herbert Johnson, Karla Nweje, Aneka McMullen, Jason Noer (aka B-Boy J-Sun), Kevin Moore (aka KAOZ) and Roosevelt Mansfield (aka DJ Digie).

Friday, February 7 | 7:30pm - Ordway
Performance: Rennie Harris Puremovement

Bold, original hip-hop dance that extends beyond boundaries

ART OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

Friday, February 7 – Wednesday, February 19 | Ordway
Art Exhibition Opening Night: Art of the African Diaspora

Four Twin Cities-based visual artists share their perspectives through work that explores the themes of sound, movement and memory, inspired by the Ordway performances in February. A portrait of Nelson Mandela by Lorenzo Crockett, originally created for TOPC, will remain in the Ordway lobby through Black History Month as part of the fine arts exhibit.

Visual Artists: Catherine Kennedy, Memory Artist;
Jaques Elate Joss (Sakara Djeki), Movement Artist; Douglas Ewart, Sound Artist;
Shirley Jones, Youth Artist; **Curators:** Roderic "hernub" Southall and Hawona Sullivan Janzen

LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO

Sunday, February 9 | 6:30pm - Ordway
Ordway Extra: Voice of a Nation: South African Musical Traditions

Dr. Leon Rodrigues, Bethel University, will share his experiences with Apartheid including particular songs that influenced revolutionary action. Professor Sowah Mensah, Macalester College, will share his knowledge of African music and lead a chorus of "Nkosi Sikelele Africa."

Sunday, February 9 | 7:30pm - Ordway
Performance: Ladysmith Black Mambazo

Intricate rhythms and harmonies of South African traditions, and gospel music, four-time Grammy Award winner.

MARIA DE BARROS

Wednesday, February 19 | 5:30-6:30pm - Ordway
African Influences in Caribbean Cultural Dance and Drum

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Experience a dance class that partners dancer/instructor Aiyana Machado in West African djembe dances and bomba with percussionist/vocalist Maria Isa Perez.

\$10 Pre-registration is required.

Wednesday, February 19 | 6:30pm - Ordway

Ordway Extra: Passing It On: Oral Traditions and Family Ties

Vocalists Elsa Vega Perez and Maria Isa Perez will share their own artistic journeys and the importance of the relationship between elder and youth to carry forward cultural traditions.

Wednesday, February 19 | 7:30pm - Ordway

Performance with dance floor: Maria de Barros

Lively and vivacious interpretation of Cabo Verdean music with opening band **Havana Hi-Fi** and a special introduction by

Naomi Tutu

, in partnership with Youthprise.

RONALD K. BROWN

Tuesday, February 25 | 7pm - Ordway

Ronald K. Brown Visit

Afternoon visit to Seed Academy & Harvest Prep to work with students and faculty.

Evening reception at the Ordway, open to community

THE GERSHWINS' PORGY AND BESS

Tuesday, Mar. 25- Sunday, Mar. 30 | Various times - Ordway

Performance: *The Gershwins' Porgy & Bess*

Stunning new staging of the Gershwin masterpiece, 2012 Tony Award winner for Best Revival of a Musical

Thursday, March 27 | 6:30pm - Ordway

Ordway Extra: Our Place Centerstage: *The Contribution of African Americans on Broadway*

A conversation led by Twin Cities' professional theater artist Austene Van and featuring performances by Tonia Hughes and Cameron Wright.

STEP AFRIKA!

Saturday, May 31, 11am & 2pm; Sunday, June 1, 11:15am - Ordway

Performance: Step Afrika! (Part of Flint Hills International Children's Festival)

Explosive and highly visual rhythmic performances of body percussion

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Tickets and Registration

Ticket Office: 651.224.4222 | Groups: 651.282.3111 | ordway.org