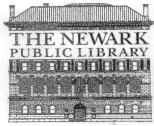


THE NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY
5 WASHINGTON STREET, NEWARK, NEW JERSEY 07102



PRESS RELEASE

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Please Contact: Heidi Cramer 973-733-7837

Pam Goldstein, 973-377-0300, ext. 14

Newark Public Library Celebrates Black Theatre

The Newark Public Library will present a two-month series of events and exhibitions exploring the world of black theatre from Newark's groundbreaking companies of the 1960s to Broadway stars like Ethel Waters and Lena Horne.

New Jersey theatrical giant Paul Robeson will be celebrated, along with lesser known figures including Hollywood actor Lorenzo Tucker, who was known as the "black Valentino."

The series is part of the Library's 2012 Black History Month celebration, ***We Wear the Mask: Black Theatre in Newark & Near, From 1700s to 2012***, which ends March 24. A Library exhibit, curated by Sandra L. West, includes artifacts such as a photo of Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong in the all-star black jazz opera *Swingin' The Dream*, a version of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. There is also a 1959 Playbill from the original production of *Raisin in the Sun*.

Black theatre in Newark has a rich and often overlooked history that stretches back to the 18th-century, including a vital community theatre scene in the 1970s and 1980s. On Broadway, black actors and actresses battled segregation and racist stereotypes to win acclaim on stage.

The series kicks off with a February 1 exhibit opening and reception celebrating the birthday of poet and playwright Langston Hughes, a former Westfield, NJ resident, who debuted his 1930s play *Black Nativity* in Newark. *Langston, We Love you Madly!* will feature a talk by historian Dr. Wendell Holbrook, Associate Professor in the Department of African American Affairs, Rutgers University – Newark, and a performance by the Adelaide Drummers from the Dr. Adelaide Sanford Charter School in Newark. Clarence Ali, founder, Theatre of Universal Images will speak about Theatre in Newark and David Mills, a Hughes scholar/interpreter, will discuss, *The Art of Langston*. Cynthia "Lady Rose" Roberson will sing the Negro National Anthem.

The free event will be held at Centennial Hall from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Main Library at 5 Washington Street.

According to Wilma Grey, Newark Public Library Director, “African American writers, producers, and performers have a deep and wonderful history in the American theatre. They played a major role in creating its vitality and helping to maintain its popularity despite the many obstacles they faced. And some of Newark’s finest writers, producers, actors, and theatre companies were a large part of this history. Their work and support have helped to make American theatre, particularly Black dramatic theatre, an important pillar of our nation’s artistic and cultural tradition. *We Wear the Mask* will honor these individuals and groups.”

Adds exhibit curator West, “I always attempt to teach from a vantage point of victory. This is why Black History Month programs are important to me, and this is why a public teach-in of black drama is important, because black drama is so liberating—whether we are actor or audience.”

Funding for the Library’s Black History Month activities and exhibits has been provided by a generous grant from the PNC Foundation.

“We’re privileged to continue our long-standing support of the Newark Public Library and its celebration of the vast contributions of the African-American community to our cultural history during Black History Month,” said Linda Bowden, northern New Jersey Regional President for PNC. “The focus of this year’s exhibit on black theatre and the role the city of Newark played in fostering black theatre’s emergence from Broad Street to Broadway clearly merits applause across the community.”

All programs are free and open to the public. Guided tours of the exhibit will be offered on Tuesday, February 7; Wednesday, February 22; and Thursday, March 8 at 10 a.m., 12 p.m., and 2 p.m. For more information or to arrange a tour of the exhibit, please call 973-733-5411. In case of inclement weather, please call 973-733-7800 (Main Library), 973-733-7751 (Weequahic Branch), 973-733-7755 (Vailsburg Branch) or 973-733-7736 (Springfield Branch) to determine whether the Library is open.

Below is a list of events:

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4

The Sounds of Broadway, sung by the North Jersey Philharmonic Glee Club, noon to 3 p.m., Centennial Hall, Main Library, 5 Washington Street

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8

Theatre in DVD Form: Plays of August Wilson (1945-2005) and Plays of Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965), 3 to 6 p.m., 4th Floor Auditorium, Main Library

Speak Up & Get Out: Teen Dating Violence Awareness Film Tour with Jordan Coleman, 5 p.m. screening of *Payin’ The Price* (HBO Best Feature Film winner 2011), a film written and directed by teen Jordan Coleman. The film chronicles the story of Jazz, a high schooler, who is accused of brutally assaulting a girl. Jazz becomes the poster boy for teen dating violence as the film follows his arrest and trial. Springfield Branch Library, 50 Hayes Street

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Come meet the cast of *For Colored Girls!* A dramatic presentation/play excerpt/play discussion, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., Centennial Hall, Main Library

Speak Up & Get Out: Teen Dating Violence Awareness Film Tour with Jordan Coleman, 5 p.m.
Weequahic Branch Library, 355 Osborne Terrace

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

A celebration of the first anniversary of the W. E. B. Du Bois Reading Circle, 6 to 8 p.m.
Community Room, Weequahic Branch. Visitors may attend and read their favorite poem, short
essay or quote by an African American hero. The circle is reading and discussing *Cross of
Redemption* by James Baldwin. Weequahic Branch, 355 Osborne Terrace

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7

A day-long "Tribute to Ethel Waters & Lena Horne, Black Ladies on White Broadway" with a
screening of the films, *Cabin in the Sky* and *Pinky* from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the 4th Floor
Auditorium. Dr. Linda Caldwell Epps of Seton Hall University will lead a workshop from 2 to 4
p.m. in the James Brown African American Room titled *Pinky Under the Microscope*, and author
Donald Bogle will give a talk on his Lena Horne and Ethel Waters books from 6 to 8 p.m. in the
4th Floor Auditorium.

Doc Gibbs: World of Percussion! 5:30 p.m. Master percussionist Doc Gibbs will take the
audience on an exciting journey to various countries through the power of drums and
percussion. Vailsburg Branch Library, 75 Alexander Street

SATURDAY, MARCH 10

Philip Thomas, executive director of Newark Symphony Hall, will moderate a panel discussion
on *The State of Black Theatre* with playwright Amiri Baraka, actor Stephen McKinley
Henderson, Woody King, theatre producer; Marie Thomas, actor in Main Library's Centennial
Hall from 12 to 3 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14

Doc Gibbs: World of Percussion! 10:30 a.m., Main Library, Centennial Hall and 5:30 p.m.,
Weequahic Branch Library, 355 Osborne Terrace.