



## NEWS

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### **Penn Live Arts and The Negro Ensemble Company Announce New Residency for 2022-23 Season**

***Our Voices, Our Time: One-Act Play Festival features new works***  
**[Call for Scripts: Submissions accepted April 1 through April 30, 2022](#)**

***Residency also includes the world premiere of a new work juxtaposing the  
1960s Civil Rights Movement and the social justice movement of today, and  
engagement activities in the Philadelphia community***

***Collaboration is first major pillar of Penn Live Arts' 50th anniversary celebration***

(Philadelphia – March 15, 2022) — [Penn Live Arts \(PLA\)](#) and the Tony® and Obie Award-winning [Negro Ensemble Company \(NEC\)](#) have announced a new residency that brings together one of the most important Black theatre producers in the United States and the University of Pennsylvania's nexus of the performing arts, two legacy organizations that share a mission of advancing innovative, contemporary theatre. The goal of the yearlong residency is to reflect authentic, underrepresented stories of the Black experience and elevate meaningful and thought-provoking conversations on the monumental role of Black artists in shaping art and culture in our country.

“The timing of this residency could not be more powerful and prescient for The Negro Ensemble Company, Inc.,” said **Artistic Director and Executive Producer Karen Brown**. “We are in midst of actively systematizing a training and producing platform that will support and present considerably more artists than currently in place. The reality of a residency with Penn Live Arts is extraordinary. The NEC/PLA relationship provides NEC with greater visibility, more sustainable collaborative opportunities and broadens our geographic reach. We are delighted.”

“Penn Live Arts' residency with The Negro Ensemble Company is one of the pillars of our 50th anniversary celebration,” said **Executive and Artistic Director Christopher Gruits**. “This residency harkens back to our long history of innovation, experimentation and fostering of new works by the world's greatest artists. NEC is investing in and developing the future of Black voices and Black theatre. We are honored to work alongside them toward this objective, and thrilled to welcome them to Philadelphia.”

## About the Residency

The residency, NEC's first with a major institution, will span the 2022-23 season/academic year and encompass a one-act play festival in the fall and the world premiere of a new multidisciplinary theatre work in the spring. Additionally, the residency will include collaborative community activities with NEC artists and Penn students and faculty, notably Penn Professor of English and Africana Studies **Herman Beavers**, who teaches (with Professor Suzana Berger) the arts-based community service course entitled, "August Wilson and Beyond," in which Penn students read the groundbreaking playwright's American Century Cycle, a collection of ten plays that form an iconic picture of African American traditions, traumas, and triumphs through the decades.

**Our Voices, Our Time**, the one-act play festival, seeks to amplify and celebrate Black voices, stories, and perspectives through the work of three playwrights, selected from a pool of scripts submitted from around the world. Playwrights will be selected in June, and in October each play will be produced and see its world premiere at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts before going on to New York. [Scripts submissions will be accepted April 1 through April 30. Application information and guidelines can be accessed here.](#)

A new play, directed by five-time NAACP best directing award-winner **Denise Dowse** and with designer **Patrice Andrew Davidson**, juxtaposing the Civil Rights Movement with the social justice movement of today, will receive its world premiere in February 2023. This new work will merge live music, dance, 1960s protest poetry, and contemporary writings that reflect on our nation's recent racial reckoning. The play also takes inspiration from Ntozake Shange's acclaimed theatre piece, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow is Enuf*.

## The Negro Ensemble Company

Since its founding in the 1960s, **The Negro Ensemble Company, Inc. (NEC)** has been a seminal and leading creative voice in Black theater in America. Born during one of the most turbulent times in American history, NEC has created a powerful legacy of high-caliber artistic productions through poignant visual stories of cultural, societal, and historic relevance. Now embarking on its 55th season, NEC continues to address the critical issues impacting our society and the world today.

NEC has produced over 200 new plays and provided training, visibility, and development for scores of artists including actors, directors, playwrights, designers, and technical artists through productions both on and off-Broadway. The long NEC history includes acclaimed stagings of *Happy Ending*, the reverse minstrel show *Day of Absence*, *The River Niger*, which won the Tony Award, and Charles Fuller's Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Soldier's Play*.

Prior to the 1960s, there were virtually no outlets for the wealth of black theatrical talent in America. In 1965, playwright Douglas Turner Ward, producer/actor Robert Hooks, and theatre manager Gerald Krone came together to make these dreams a reality with the creation of the Negro Ensemble Company (NEC). With money from the Ford Foundation and a home at the St. Marks Playhouse, the Negro Ensemble Company was officially established in 1967. An impressive list of stage and screen artists have passed through NEC ranks over the years including Samuel L. Jackson, Denzel Washington, Phylicia Rashad, S.Epatha Merkerson, and Samm-Art Williams, among many others.

During the pandemic, the Negro Ensemble Company continued to nurture emerging theater artists by creating on-line content and a 10-minute play competition.

## **Penn Live Arts**

Penn Live Arts (PLA), with its home the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, celebrates its 50th anniversary in the 2022-23 season. The first performing arts center in Philadelphia, PLA has long been an artistic crossroads joining the University of Pennsylvania and the greater Philadelphia region. Over its 50 years PLA has introduced Philadelphia audiences to artists and innovative programming that would not otherwise have been seen in the region. The early years, in particular, reflected a passionate commitment to the theatre arts. Two of Broadway's greatest director/producers, Harold Prince and Joseph Papp, regularly brought productions to the Annenberg Center prior to their New York openings. Annenberg Center stages hosted such great actors as Liv Ullman, Jason Robards, Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy, and works by playwrights David Mamet, Edward Albee, and August Wilson. It was only after the successful Philadelphia premiere of the latter's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, which opened the 1983-84 Annenberg Center season and introduced August Wilson to Philadelphia, that the decision was made to take the production to Broadway. In keeping with this long tradition, Penn Live Arts will give the world premieres of all of the plays produced in the residency in Philadelphia before they open in New York. Reflecting Penn's core values as a globally-respected academic institution, PLA emphasizes artistic and intellectual excellence and diversity in its offerings, prioritizing broad inclusiveness in the artists, audiences and groups it serves. **PLA's full 50th anniversary season, with a robust schedule of music, dance, theatre and film will be announced May 5.**

The residency is made possible in part by a generous **ArtsForward** grant from the **Association for Performing Arts Professionals (APAP)** through **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**. The Association of Performing Arts Professionals is the national service, advocacy and membership organization for the performing arts presenting, booking and touring field. *ArtsForward* is a new program to support the field's safe, vibrant, and equitable reopening and recovery.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation believes that the arts and humanities are where we express our complex humanity, believing that everyone deserves the beauty, transcendence, and freedom to be found there. Through its grants, the Foundation seeks to build just communities enriched by meaning and empowered by critical thinking, where ideas and imagination can thrive.

Additional support is provided through an Extended Artist Residency grant from **The Sachs Program for Arts Innovation**. The Sachs Program for Arts Innovation provides grants and other forms of strategic support to artists, faculty, cultural centers, students, and other arts advocates at Penn. The Sachs Program's vision is that the arts at Penn are valued and embraced as a creative catalyst, driving innovation, inspiration, and action.

NEC is the 2022-23 Artist-in-Residence of the **Brownstein Residency for Artistic Innovation**.

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