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AFROSOLO THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS
AFROSOLO ARTS FESTIVAL 15
RESILIENCE: My Culture, My People, Me!
August 2-October 16, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO (June 26, 2008) – San Francisco’s award-winning AfroSolo Theatre Company presents the 15th annual **AfroSolo Arts Festival**, celebrating African American artists giving voice to the Black experience. Paying homage to and exploring the rich legacy of African Americans and people of African descent, the theme of this year’s festival is **RESILIENCE: My Culture, My People, Me!** Festival events (**August 2-October 16**) featuring live music, visual art, and new works for the stage will take place at various venues around San Francisco: Yerba Buena Gardens, the Main San Francisco Public Library, The Marsh, and Yoshi’s San Francisco Jazz Club. Most events, unless otherwise noted, are free and open to the public. For more information, the public may visit **afrosolo.org** or call **415-771-AFRO(2376)**.

“We are particularly excited about our theme of resilience,” said **Thomas Robert Simpson**, AfroSolo founding Artistic Director. “This year’s festival provides an opportunity for our artists to explore and draw upon the legacies of their history; it is also an opportunity to see our stories connect and unite with people of all cultures. Although our theme is based on the Black experience, resilience knows no racial boundaries. It is my hope that the works presented in AfroSolo 15 will provide inspiration to move past all of the difficulties we face in today’s world.”

The line up for this year is as follows:

SaxoPhoNia: In Praise of the Saxophone
Outdoor Jazz Concert in Yerba Buena Gardens
Saturday, August 2, 1-4 pm
Yerba Buena Gardens (Mission Street between 3rd & 4th, SF)
Free and open to the public

In collaboration with the Yerba Buena Gardens Festival, AfroSolo presents its seventh free jazz concert in the gardens. Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, Lester Young, James Moody – this year, AfroSolo celebrates the saxophone and the jazz innovators who pioneered today’s modern saxophone sound. Pack a picnic

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and bring a blanket and enjoy a wonderful afternoon of jazz featuring **Richard Howell**, 15 year-old Bay Area musical prodigy **Razel Merritt**, and **Robin Nzinga Smith** presenting three diverse takes on jazz saxophone.

Vocalist and instrumentalist **Richard Howell** has worked with Babatunde Lea, the Bay Area Afro/Indian/jazz improvisational group The Supplicants, jazz/poetry ensemble Upsurge, and the Big Belly Blues Band. He lectures on jazz history and is currently developing jazz education programs.

Razel Merritt is a member of the Oaktown Jazz Workshops. Although young in age, he has garnered a reputation for his tonal quality and has performed with many of today's leading jazz artists.

Robin Nzingah Smith studied at Harlem's Jazzmobile, Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, and the Berkeley School of Music. She plays with Music She Wrote, a band dedicated to music composed by women and is the lead alto saxophonist in the Count Basie Tribute Band.

Resilience: My Culture, My People, Me!

Visual Arts Exhibit

Saturday, August 16 – Saturday, October 16

(Artist Reception Sunday, August 17, 2-4pm)

Main San Francisco Public Library (100 Larkin Street at Grove)

Free and open to the public

Focusing on the theme of resilience to examine the Black experience in the United States, this uplifting, inspiring, and thought-provoking multi-media exhibit showcases the works of AfroSolo alumni visual artists. Featuring: Opal Adisa; Elouise Burrell; Christine Carmel; Karen Carraway; Duane Cramer; Jim Dennis; Keina Davis Elswick; Idris Hassan; Stephanie Anne Johnson; Ajuan Mance; Justice Renaissance; Joseph Robinson; Michael Ross; Malik Seneferu; Nena St. Louis; Orlonda Uffre; Umi Vaughan; and Wanda Whitaker.

In Honor of Four Great Ones:

John Coltrane, Sammy Davis, Jr., Duke Ellington, and Hope Foye

Gala Concert at Yoshi's San Francisco

Monday, August 18, 8pm (gala reception 6pm)

Yoshi's San Francisco (1330 Fillmore Street)

Tickets: \$25 Balcony, \$35 Main Floor, \$60 Gala reception and priority seating

86 year-old opera soprano **Hope Foye**'s extraordinary journey has taken her from a foster family in Middletown, Connecticut to an acclaimed international career as a classically trained soprano. Mentored by Paul Robeson, she is the recipient of three Rockefeller Grants, has performed in Madison Square Garden, and both on and Off-Broadway. Foye will perform songs from her repertoire and will be honored with AfroSolo's Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award.

Noah Griffin, Ohnedaruth, and Robert Sims (additional performer TBA) will perform tributes to late greats Sammy Davis, Jr., Duke Ellington, and John Coltrane.

Comprised of members of the Saint John Coltrane Church in San Francisco, **Ohnedaruth** (Sanskrit for "compassion") will perform *A Tribute to John Coltrane*, featuring the melodies, harmonies and rhythms of John Coltrane's masterpiece *A Love Supreme*. Ohnedaruth has performed to critical acclaim at virtually

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every Jazz venue in the Bay Area, including Kimball's East, Yoshi's, Bimbo's, and the San Jose Jazz Festival. The group has also played at the Antibes Jazz Festival and at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Performing *A Tribute to Sammy Davis, Jr.* is Bay Area native **Noah Griffin**. Griffin began his singing career at the age of seven when he joined the San Francisco Boys Chorus; since then, he has performed with Duke Ellington, and shared the stage with Paul Robeson, Nat King Cole, and Leontyne Price. He has performed at venues including Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas and New York's Birdland. Most recently, Griffin played a six-month engagement at the Fairmont Hotel and was featured in Oakland Opera Theater's production of Duke Ellington's *Queenie Pie*.

A leading interpreter of African American spirituals, **Robert Sims** recently made his recital debut at Carnegie Hall. He has been featured in concerts at Lincoln Center, the Smithsonian, the African American Museum in Los Angeles, Grace Cathedral, the Latour de France International Music Festival, and the American Church in Paris.

Black Voices Series

Thursday, August 21-Sunday, August 24

Thursday-Saturday, 8pm; Sunday, 3pm

The Marsh, 1062 Valencia Street (near 22nd and Mission, SF)

Tickets: \$25 General Admission

Idris Ackamoor, Angela Dean-Baham, and Laura Elaine Ellis will perform original solo stage works inspired by the AfroSolo 15 Festival theme of resilience. Additional performance TBA.

Idris Ackamoor, directed by Rhodessa Jones, will perform *Music for One Hand Clapping*. Combining elements of music, dance, theater, and video, this piece presents stories of artists, including Django Reinhardt, Peg Leg Bates, and Paul Wittgenstein, who overcame physical disabilities to garner worldwide acclaim for their art. An instrumentalist, composer, actor, and dancer, Ackamoor is Founder and Executive/ Co-Artistic Director of Cultural Odyssey.

Angela Dean-Baham, directed by Rhodessa Jones, will perform *Unsung Diva: The Life and Times of Sissieretta Jones, aka Black Patti*, recalling the story of acclaimed Metropolitan Opera soprano Adelina Patti, one of America's first African American international opera stars. Dean-Baham is a singer based in the Bay Area. She has appeared with Berkeley Opera, Pocket Opera, Oakland Lyric Opera and Oakland Opera Theater.

Laura Elaine Ellis, in collaboration with poet Marc Bamuthi Joseph, composer Ajayi Lumumba, and photographer Kimara Dixon, will perform the World Premiere of *i that is we*, an original dance performance inspired by Nina Simone's song *Four Women*. Ellis was an assistant director and company member of Anne Bluethenthal and Dancers of San Francisco, a company member and principal dancer for Dimensions Dance Theater of Oakland, and a company member, soloist and assistant producer for LAZARUS/Dance of San Francisco, among others.

UNITED IN HEALTH 3:

Artists, Healthcare Workers and Community

Saturday, August 23, 2008, 10 am – 2 pm

Ella Hill Hutch Community Center, 1050 McAllister Street (at Webster, SF)

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Free and open to the public

In collaboration with Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, MoMagic, St. Mary's Hospital, and California Pacific Medical Center, AfroSolo hosts a community health fair to aimed at increasing health awareness in the African American community. With the goal of motivating participants to make positive health decisions, the fair will provide health screenings, demonstrations, and access to healthcare professionals, in addition to food, games, and prizes.

Founded in 1993 by Jefferson Award-winner **Thomas Robert Simpson, AfroSolo Theatre Company** presents the experiences of African Americans and those from the African Diaspora through solo performances and the visual and literary arts. Through these mediums, people of all ethnicities are brought together to explore and share the human spirit that binds us all. AfroSolo has presented celebrity guests, including award-winning Broadway actor Ruby Dee; political humorist and activist Dick Gregory; the late blues and jazz legend Charles Brown; the late poet June Jordan; legendary songstress Mavis Staples; and gospel artist Emmitt Powell. The AfroSolo Festival has presented the works of over 115 emerging solo artists.

In addition to general admission tickets (\$25-60), a limited number of special Festival passes (\$100) are available (passes include priority seating at all events, admission to a Black Voices performance, and the Yoshi's Gala Concert and reception). For tickets and more information, the public may visit **afrosolo.org** or call **415-771-AFRO(2376)**.

Funding for the AfroSolo Theatre Company is made possible in part through the support of African American Art & Culture Complex, California Pacific Medical Center, Friends of AfroSolo LEF Foundation, San Francisco Arts Commission, San Francisco Foundation, San Francisco Grants for the Arts/Hotel Tax Fund, The National Endowment for the Arts, Yerba Buena Gardens Festival, and the Zellerbach Family Foundation. Idris Ackamoor received an Individual Artist Commission Grant from the San Francisco Art Commission to create and perform *Music for One Hand Clapping*.

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FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

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TICKETS:

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PHOTOS:

Art for the 15th annual **AfroSolo Arts Festival** can be obtained upon request by emailing [brightbutterfly\[at\]hotmail.com](mailto:brightbutterfly[at]hotmail.com)