

media contact:
erica lewis -finein
brightbutterfly pr
brightbutterfly[at]hotmail.com

**AFROSOLO THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS
AFROSOLO ARTS FESTIVAL 16
August 1-October 15, 2009**

SAN FRANCISCO (June 24, 2009) – San Francisco’s award-winning **AfroSolo Theatre Company** presents the 16th 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, Festival events (**August 1-October 15**) featuring live music, visual art, and new works for the stage will take place in San Francisco at Yerba Buena Gardens, the Main San Francisco Public Library, the African American Art and Culture Complex, and the Ella Hill Hutch Community Center. 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)**.

“In celebrating our 16th AfroSolo Arts Festival, I am very excited about the depth, quality, and diversity of artists we will be presenting,” says **AfroSolo Artistic Director Thomas Robert Simpson**. “The Festival, which features artists ranging in age from 25 to 87, offers something for everyone. This year, we are especially proud to honor our featured visual artist, Morrie Turner, and legendary musician Frank Jackson with AfroSolo Lifetime Artistic Achievement Awards, as they epitomize resilience and artistic integrity, and serve as an inspiration for all.”

The line up for AfroSolo 16 is as follows:

**Outdoor Jazz Concert in Yerba Buena Gardens
Saturday, August 1, 1-4 pm
Yerba Buena Gardens (Mission Street between 3rd & 4th, SF)
open to the public (no pets, service animals excepted)**

In collaboration with the Yerba Buena Gardens Festival and the Jazz Heritage Center, AfroSolo presents its eighth free concert in the gardens. This year’s offering features vocalist **Nicolas Bearde**, legendary pianist **Frank Jackson**, and Bay Area singer **Raja Rahim**.

A supremely gifted soul, jazz, and R&B singer, **Nicolas Bearde** has been compared to vocal icons such as Lou Rawls, Marvin Gaye, Donny Hathaway, and Jon Lucien. He was member of Bobby McFerrin’s Voicestra, the innovative a cappella group of which Bearde was a founding member, and SoVoSo, the artistic offshoot of Voicestra. Additionally, Bearde has worked with an array of artists, including Patti Austin, Michael Bolton, Janis Siegel, and John Handy, and has recorded three albums for Right Groove Records, *Crossing the Line* (1998), *All About Love* (2005), and *Live at Yoshi's - A Salute to Lou* (2008).

For more than 50 years **Frank Jackson** has been serving up his smooth, elegant piano style. Jackson was the house pianist at San Francisco’s renowned Bop City Jazz Club, playing with such greats as Charlie “Bird” Parker, Billie Holiday, Frank Foster, Ben Webster, Ella Fitzgerald, Harold Land, Joe Comfort, Erroll Garner, Art “God” Tatum, Nat “King” Cole, Chet Baker, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Quincy Jones, Dizzy Gillespie, and Louis Armstrong, among other. His one-of-a-kind interpretations and vocal renderings have earned Jackson the respect and admiration of musicians and music lovers alike. Jackson will be presented with AfroSolo’s

Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award at this event.

Raja Rahim is an emerging Bay Area artist with influences ranging from Sarah Vaughn, Carmen McCreia, and Ella Fitzgerald, among others. Under the tutelage of Dr. Helen Dilworth and Judy Hubbell of City College of San Francisco, and the mentorship of Jim Larkin, Rahim has developed a unique, sultry, and intimate style of her own. She has performed with such artists as David Hardiman Jr., Mr. Bill Bell (The Jazz Professor), The San Francisco All Stars, Maestro Curtis, and Jaye Richardson. For this event, Rahim will be accompanied by the Herbert Mims Jr. Band.

A Staged Reading: *Waiting for Giovanni*
By Jewelle Gomez in collaboration with Harry Waters Jr.
Saturday, August 8, 3pm
African American Art and Culture Complex (762 Fulton Street)
Open to the public
Tickets: Donation/Pay What You Can

Based on a split second of indecision in the life of author James Baldwin, *Waiting for Giovanni* explores a writer's dilemma about publishing a controversial book that will have a profound impact on his life, the lives of his friends, his family, and on the Civil Rights Movement. *Waiting for Giovanni* questions what it really means to be an artist and activist, and how we live that out in our everyday lives. Playwright and actor **Brian Freeman** directs.

Jewelle Gomez is a writer and activist. She is the author of the double Lambda Award-winning novel *The Gilda Stories*. Her fiction, essays, criticism and poetry have appeared in numerous periodicals, including the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The New York Times*, *Village Voice*, *Ms. Magazine*, *ESSENCE*, *The Advocate*, *Callaloo*, and *Black Scholar*. She is also the author of a book of personal and political essays entitled *Forty-three Septembers*, and a collection of short fiction, *Don't Explain*. Her new projects include a comic novel about black activists of the 1960s.

Actor, director and teacher **Harry Waters, Jr.** originated the role of Belize in the San Francisco production of *Angels in America* and has since been featured in numerous films and television shows. Waters is currently a professor in the Theatre and Dance Department of Macalester College in Minneapolis.

Brian Freeman is an AfroSolo Arts Festival alumnus. He has written or co-authored numerous plays, solo shows and performance works. He has directed and developed plays with the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, New York Shakespeare Festival/ Public Theater, the Theater Offensive, Teatro Vision, and San Francisco Mime Troupe. Awards include the CalArts Alpert Award in Theater, and the New York Dance & Performance Bessie Award.

Visual Arts Exhibit
MORRIE TURNER, Creator of *Wee Pals* Cartoon: A 45-Year Retrospective
August 15 – October 15
(Artist Reception - TBA)
Main San Francisco Public Library (100 Larkin Street at Grove)
Free and open to the public

When Morrie Turner asked Charles Schultz, creator of the *Peanuts* cartoon strip, asked why

there were no people of color in comics, Schultz suggested that Turner create one. In 1965, Turner, who had no formal visual arts training, created *Wee Pals*, the first nationally syndicated racially-integrated comic strip. Initially, few newspapers were interested in a racially-integrated cartoon, but after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., there was a surge of interest, resulting in over 100 newspapers publishing *Wee Pals*.

AfroSolo honors Turner's artistic achievements with a retrospective of his work, curated by Kheven LaGrone. Additionally, artwork by students from the Oakland School of the Arts who participated in workshops Turner held this past fall will also be included in the exhibit.

AfroSolo will present Turner its Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award at the artist reception.

Black Voices Performance Series

Friday, August 21 - Saturday, August 22, 8pm; Sunday, August 23, 3pm
The African American Art and Culture Complex (762 Fulton Street, SF)
Tickets: \$25 General Admission

Thandiwe Thomas De Shazor, Kai Hazelwood, Lance McGee, and Lauren Whitehead perform original solo stage works as part of this year's Black Voices Performance Series.

Thandiwe Thomas De Shazor presents *Children of the Last Days*, a colorful and comedic semi-autobiographical performance piece that explores, juxtaposes, and satirizes the modern Black church and the Black gay community. De Shazor has been performing for over on stage for over 10 years; he has appeared in productions of *Oklahoma*, *The Music Man*, *Lysistrata*, and Ron Allen's *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. He studied under Hilary Ramsden, co-founder of the Furniture Factory, and was an apprentice at Oakland University's Meadowbrook Theatre.

Kai Hazelwood presents *Trans*, a dance performance that explores the transitions one goes through to emerge from a life-shattering event in one piece. For over 19 years, Hazelwood has been blending a traditional Ballet background with contemporary lyricism, modern athleticism, funk, and ethnic flair ranging from Afro-Caribbean, to Belly Dancing and Argentine Tango. Trained at the San Francisco Ballet School, Hazelwood is currently completing a degree in Dance at UCLA.

Lance McGee presents *Dancin' Soulo*, a dramatic, at times humorous, investigation of one man's complex needs for love, validation, security, and the desire to live life to its fullest. McGee, aka The Unique Derique, is an Emmy Award-winning clown best known for his Hambone body percussion. McGee has opened for Sammy Davis Jr. and Lou Rawls and has at the Prescott Circus Theater in West Oakland for the past 13 years.

Lauren Whitehead presents *Written in Blues*, an exploration of music, love, race, time, and why some women get the blues. Whitehead is a vocalist, poet, and director who has performed at venues across the United States. She will soon be featured in the HBO documentary *Russell Simmons Presents: Brave New Voices*. She is Program Manager of Youth Programs at Youth Speaks in San Francisco.

UNITED IN HEALTH
Artists, Healthcare Workers, and Community
Saturday, August 22, 2009, 10 am – 2 pm

**Ella Hill Hutch Community Center (1050 McAllister Street at Webster, SF)
Free and open to the public**

In collaboration with Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, MoMagic, Kaiser Permanente, St. Mary's Hospital, and California Pacific Medical Center, AfroSolo hosts a community health fair. This event is free and open to the public, and includes community forums, health care screenings and demonstrations, information tables, 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 Emmit Powell. The AfroSolo Festival has presented the works of over 115 emerging solo artists.

Funding for the AfroSolo Theatre Company is made possible in part through the support of the California Arts Council, U. S. Census 2010, Friends of AfroSolo, Horizons Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 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.

Presenting Partners: African American Art & Culture Complex, BGLAM, California Pacific Medical Center, The Jazz Heritage Center, Kaiser Permanente, San Francisco Main Public Library, and Yerba Buena Gardens Festival.

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PHOTOS:

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FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

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