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Ivan Fitzgerald

President

## Setting the Stage

Have you ever heard of Abiodun Oyewole? He is one of the "Last Poets" that performed for African Continuum Theatre this year and he moved our audience. This type of quality performance is something that African Continuum Theatre will continue to offer.

Over the past year African Continuum Theatre has embarked on a journey to rejuvenate its image as a "21st century non-profit organization."

The African Continuum Theatre has always had a strong legacy of high-quality artistic programming and a sound artistic model. To complement our artistic legacy, we have put in place improvements to the business model of the organization.

ACTCo has:

- Integrated new technology and digital media platforms.
- Captured the voices of our staff and *Poets on Stage* through video, which can be viewed on our newly designed website.
- Became, and will be more, involved in the social media realm and has built and will continue to build an online community on *Facebook* and other such outlets.
- Implemented strong financial oversight and governance guidelines.
- Streamlined our business model.
- Planted the seeds to grow our marketing and development base.

### This is only the beginning...

We recently completed a strategic planning process that helped to set the direction of our vision, as we further transform how we operate. We are shaping the African Continuum Theatre to be a strong leader in the artistic community, as well as in the business community. We hope that you will support us in our endeavors to bring professional black theatre to the forefront in the Washington metropolitan area and beyond.

The staff and board of the African Continuum Theatre put forth great efforts to successfully complete the Theatre's "Season of Strength" and move forward with its 14th season, the "Season of Renewal." The African Continuum Theatre's "Season of Renewal" means exciting new plays for our audience and greater community involvement. In the coming year, one of our primary goals is to build our audience by increasing our reach to our local, national and international communities.

We are extremely excited about the future of The African Continuum Theatre and we invite you to share in the exhilarating experience of quality theatre. Though we have made great progress, we recognize the challenges we face, as well.

No one can escape the current macro-economic conditions. Many local businesses are suffering greatly and need to make significant changes in order to sustain, much less be profitable. We feel that we have established a sound strategy for moving forward and navigating the global economic situation that confronts us all.

Part of our strategy is to actively focus on our audience's experience. The African Continuum Theater strives to be the "pre-eminent forum for African-American theatre in the greater Washington, DC community" and the staff and board of The African Continuum Theatre will work hard to make your experience one to remember.

We will focus relentlessly on enriching the experience of our community of supporters throughout the year.

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to JoAnn M. Williams, our executive director since 2008, for her dedication and hard work. JoAnn and her staff have demonstrated a tireless commitment to the African Continuum Theatre's cause.

In addition, we sincerely thank our donors for supporting The African Continuum Theatre. Your support is crucial to our continued success; as is the continued engagement and work of our Board of Directors.

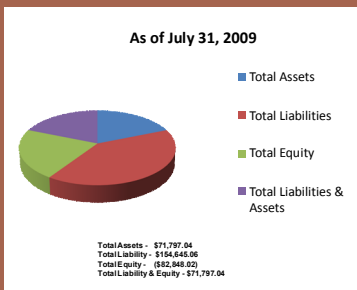
We look forward to seeing you at one of our future events.

Many thanks,



Ivan T. Fitzgerald

### Financial Overview



**African Continuum Theatre Company**

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We're on the web!

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**African Continuum Theatre Company**

# Annual Report 2008

September 1, 2008—August 31, 2009

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### Mission

To sustain and grow African-American theatre by producing new and traditional art forms that contributes to the understanding and appreciation of African-American culture.



(l-r) James Foster, Jr. and Derrick L. Sanders (Blue Door—2009)

### Vision

To be the pre-eminent forum for African-American theatre in the greater Washington, DC community.

### ACTCo Supporters

Bureau of National Affairs  
 PEPCO  
 VERIZON  
 Girlfriends—Wash. DC Chap.  
 Community Foundation  
 Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Fdn.  
 Max & Victoria Dreyfus Fdn., Inc.  
 Philip L. Graham Fund  
 DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities  
 Kellogg Fdn.  
 Eugene & Agnes Meyer Fdn.  
 MARPAT  
 Prince Charitable Trusts  
 The Washington Post  
 Weissberg Fdn.  
 Rocksprings Fdn.  
 Summit Fdn.  
 Our Individual Contributors

### History

African Continuum was founded in the fall of 1989, as the African Continuum Theatre *Coalition*, a membership service organization with a mission to strengthen and provide visibility to black theatre community. In 1996, African Continuum became a producing company and has mounted 30-plus full productions, numerous readings, and community projects.

Since that time to 2007, ACTCo has produced three-to-four productions per

season and, in addition to the main-stage performances, maintained a diverse array of programs reaching emerging African-American artists, community groups, and students. Main stage activities were reduced during the 2008 and the 2009 seasons, but will be increased again starting in 2010. ACTCo has garnered recognition for its artistic endeavors and local leadership from the Helen Hayes Awards Program, the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington, *The Washington Post* and other agencies. It has received funding from a broad array of local and national funders that recognize its value as one of the few professional African-American theatre companies in the country. ACTCo has developed a strong cadre of local supporters and stakeholders, many of whom can trace their commitment back to the organization's founding in the late 1980s.

*ACTCo will strive to have a continuous and consistent presence in the theatre community. In addition to seasons with multi-main-stage productions, an active performance ensemble and more community engagement events and performances will be held by ACTCo or with ACTCo in attendance at various community events.*

**JoAnn M. Williams**, Executive Director. Her career includes more than 20 years in the arts as a director, educator, consultant and performer. Previously, she was the Communications Director for African Continuum before the organization transitioned to a producing theatre.

Prior to being appointed, she served as the Interim Executive Director of the Dance Institute of Washington for just over a year.

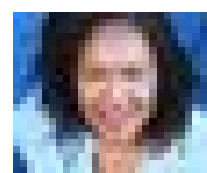
**Rebecca Sullesta**, Donor Relations Assistant, is originally from Charleston, West Virginia. Her arts administration experience includes the Phillips Collection, the Smithsonian Institution, and the J F Kennedy Center for Performing Arts. She received a MFA Degree in Art History from the University of New Orleans in 2005.

**Jacqueline E. Lawton**, Artistic Associate, (dramaturg/playwright/teaching artist) completed her MFA in Playwriting from the Univ. of Texas, Austin in May 2003. She's worked with Active Cultures, Arena Stage, Duke Ellington School of the Arts, eXtreme eXchange, Folger Shakespeare Library, Ford's Theater, Helen Hayes Washington Legacy Project, Journeymen Theater, Mead Theater Lab at Flashpoint, Rorschach Theatre Co., Round House Theater, Shakespeare Theatre Co., Synetic Theater, theHegira, Theater Alliance, Theater of the First Amendment, Towson University, Tribute Productions, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Co., and Young Playwrights' Theater.

**Renee Littleton**, Public Relations/Marketing, has worked with African Continuum Theatre since 2007. She is committed to developing and providing key solutions for organizational success. She has worked in communications and fundraising with various performing arts organizations including Arena Stage, The Washington National Opera and The Washington Chorus. Renee was also a 2005-2006 Kennedy Center Fellow in Arts Management at the John F. Kennedy Center of Performing Arts. She holds a Master's degree in Arts Management from American University, where she studied the sustainability of identity-based arts organizations.



(l-r) R. Littleton, R. Sullesta, J.M. Williams



Jacqueline E. Lawton

## Artistic Team

In lieu of a full-time, on-staff artistic director to plan and direct each season, ACTCo convened a consultant team of three senior artistic theatre professionals—Walter Dallas, Andrea Frye, Scot Reese—were selected by a board committee and staff, to ensure that African Continuum sustains its artistic vision and mission.

### Artistic team's tasks:

- \* Recommend and select themes for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 seasons;
- \* Recommend and select one play for 2009-10 and up to two plays for 2010-11 that reflect the chosen theme;
- \* Recommend educational programming and community events to support the selected theme and play;
- \* Recommend a director for each play.

An *Artistic Associate* was engaged to implement the decisions and direction of the Artistic Team, under Executive Director's supervision. They serve as the liaison with selected director of play); Work in partnership with director to cast play, (i.e., set up and follow up auditions); Coordinate all production tasks; Manage educational programming and community events.



(l-r) J.M. Williams, S. Reese, A. Frye, W. Dallas

## Programs

*ACTCo has three programs in progress-- Fresh Flavas New Works, Community Engagement Events and main-stage productions.*

### 2008-09 Season



### Fresh Flavas

Fresh Flavas: a forum for the development of new plays; public readings of new works-in-progress by emerging and established playwrights; constructive audience feedback for play and the playwright for further development; a platform for playwrights to hear their work, possibly for the first time, without a costly fully-staged production; Engages local actors and directors in the play's developmental process; and, it creates broader audience appeal that engage and attract new audience members. Program began in 2003 as a series of readings of works-in-progress by playwrights of color. These readings, using local professional actors and presented to the public, provided essential feedback in the continued evolution of the works-in-progress. Many playwrights go through the long, arduous process of play development without ever seeing the work on stage. In November of 2005, ACTCo established its commitment to cultivating new work with the world premiere of two plays. The outcome was Washington DC playwright David Toney's *Kingdom* receiving a prestigious Helen Hayes Award (Charles MacArthur Award) for Outstanding New Play of 2006.

The three playwrights for the 2009-2010 season were selected in Spring 2009 and will participate in workshop/rehearsals and public readings to develop their work, using professional actors, a director, and a new play development dramaturge. Revised drafts receive public readings in September 2009.

*King of My Kingdom: Racism and the Cultural Stereotypes of African American Men*



### Community Engagement

Educational programming and community engagement events are created to support the selected theme and plays for each season, such as *King of My Kingdom*, which took place for *Blue Door*, by Tanya Barfield, this season.



Blue Door

### Main-Stage Productions

*Our goal is to continue to produce high-quality theater.*

As the only professional African American theatre in Washington, D.C., we draw from a universal body of literature, yet reflect an aesthetic rooted in this experience. Over 30 productions have been mounted since 1996. We have garnered recognition and awards for our artistic endeavors and local leadership from the Cultural Alliance of Greater Washington, the Washington Post and other agencies. And ACTCo has received numerous forms of recognition, including 16 Helen Hayes Awards nominations, 3 Helen Hayes Awards. Recently, our production of *Intimate Apparel* by Lynn Nottage received 2 Helen Hayes Award nominations and the lead actress, Deidre LaWan Starnes, won Best Lead Actress in a resident play.

Setting the Stage