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312.443.5151 or [Press@GoodmanTheatre.org](mailto:Press@GoodmanTheatre.org) **August 30, 2023**

**“THE PEARL CLEAGE FESTIVAL”**

**CELEBRATES THE LEGACY OF LITERARY EXCELLENCE FROM ONE OF AMERICA’S MOST PROLIFIC PLAYWRIGHTS**

**AND LAUNCHES SUSAN V. BOOTH’S FIRST CURATED SEASON AS GOODMAN THEATRE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

**\*\*TWO CENTERPIECE PRODUCTIONS INCLUDE *THE NACIREMA SOCIETY*, DIRECTED BY LILI-ANNE BROWN (GOODMAN) AND *BLUES FOR AN ALABAMA SKY*, DIRECTED BY MIKAEL BURKE (REMY BUMPPO THEATRE COMPANY)\*\***

**\*\*\*READINGS AND SPECIAL EVENTS BY BLACK ENSEMBLE, CONGO SQUARE, DEFINITION THEATRE, ETA CREATIVE ARTS, MPAACT AND MORE OFFER AUDIENCES A DEEP DIVE INTO WORKS SPANNING CLEAGE’S 40-YEAR CAREER\*\*\***

(Chicago, IL) This fall, Goodman Theatre Artistic Director **Susan V. Booth** begins her first curated season as Artistic Director with a month-long citywide celebration honoring her longtime creative collaborator **Pearl Cleage**—Atlanta’s first Poet Laureate whose distinguished career spans 40 years and 30+ plays, novels, poems and essays. With accolades from the *New York Times* (Best Seller) to the NAACP (Image Award) to Oprah’s Book Club, Cleage brings to vivid life the joys and sorrows of Black womanhood in 20th century America. Conceived by Booth and curated by **Malkia Stampley**, Goodman Theatre BOLD Artistic Producer, this first-of-its-kind experience aims to acquaint audiences with a fuller depth and breadth of Cleage’s work. The festival includes two productions—***The Nacirema Society*** directed by **Lili-Anne Brown** at the Goodman and ***Blues for an Alabama Sky*** directed by **Mikael Burke** at Remy Bumppo Theatre Company—and events produced in partnership with six of Chicago’s famed Off-Loop theaters: ***Mad at Miles*** featuring **Jackie Taylor** (Black Ensemble Theater); ***Angry, Raucous and Shamelessly Gorgeous*** (Congo Square Theatre); ***A Song for Coretta*** (Definition Theatre); ***Chain*** (eta Creative Arts Foundation); ***Bourbon at the Border*** (MPAACT); ***Pointing at the Moon*** directed by **Lydia R. Diamond** and ***What I Learned in Paris*** directed by **TaRon Patton** (Goodman Theatre). The Pearl Cleage Festival runs September 14 – October 15, 2023. Visit [GoodmanTheatre.org/Pearl](http://www.GoodmanTheatre.org/Pearl) for information and tickets.

"Writing plays is the joy of my life—and being able to invite the people of Chicago to share that joy with a citywide celebration of my work is almost more than a hardworking playwright can stand. *Almost.* The magic of live theater brings us together in community like nothing else can. I am grateful to Goodman Theatre and to the amazing artists and institutions who have welcomed me over the years, and who now make me know that I will always have a home here,” said **Pearl Cleage**.

Cleage met Booth 20 years ago, when Booth was Artistic Director of Atlanta’s Alliance Theatre. Their first collaboration was *The Nacirema Society*, a 2010 world-premiere co-production between Alliance and Alabama Shakespeare Festival; Booth subsequently directed world-premiere productions of Cleage’s *What I Learned in Paris* (2012), *Angry, Raucous and Shamelessly Gorgeous* (2019), as well as the 25th anniversary revival of *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (2015).

“In starting my first season in a theater and a town that I treasure, it seemed fitting to choose *The Nacirema Society*—the play that began a relationship that I deeply treasure,” said Artistic Director **Susan V. Booth**. “I’m absolutely thrilled for Chicago to embrace Pearl, a world-class, multi-hyphenate artist who is also the warmest, most welcoming of beings, and so lucky to partner with these extraordinary organizations whose contributions will make this an artful experience our audiences will long remember.”

To curate the line-up, Booth tapped Stampley, who recently directed *In My Granny’s Garden*—Cleage’s family-friendly work written in collaboration with her husband, Zaron W. Burnett, Jr.—in Chicago Parks this summer, as a precursor to the fall festival.

“As an actor, I was enamored by the depth of Pearl Cleage's characters—one of the few playwrights to offer a cornucopia of roles for Black women of all ages and plays spanning decades, from drama and slapstick comedy. Ms. Cleage's work speaks to the curious soul in all of us, and reminds us of our capacity to love, to fight and to dream,” said BOLD Artistic Producer **Malkia Stampley**. “The Goodman is excited to amplify Cleage's work, an honor long overdue. We celebrate the tremendous legacy Ms. Pearl has built and continues to expand.”

Cleage is currently the Distinguished Artist in Residence at Atlanta’s Tony Award winning Alliance Theatre. Her play *Angry, Raucous, and Shamelessly Gorgeous*, had its world premiere as a part of the theatre’s 50th anniversary season in 2019 and recently completed a successful run at Hartford Stage. Both productions were directed by Booth. Her other plays premiered at the Alliance include *What I Learned in Paris*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, and *Flyin’ West*. Cleage’s latest play *Something Moving: A Meditation on Maynard* was commissioned by Ford Theatre’s Lincoln Legacy Project and will be produced at Ford’s Theatre in the fall of 2023. Her first of eight novels, *What Looks Like Crazy On An Ordinary Day*, was an Oprah Book Club pick and spent nine weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Cleage currently serves as Atlanta’s first Poet Laureate.

**THE 2023 “PEARL CLEAGE FESTIVAL”**

**PRODUCTIONS, READINGS, WORKSHOPS, EVENTS AND CONVERSATIONS**

**SEPTEMBER 14 – OCTOBER 15**

**PRODUCTIONS**

***Blues for an Alabama Sky***

Directed by Mikael Burke

September 14 - October 15

Remy Bumppo Theatre Company at Theater Wit (1229 W. Belmont)

It’s Summer 1930 in Harlem, and jazz singer Angel has just been fired from The Cotton Club. As she hopes for her next big break, her flatmate friends pursue their own dreams amidst daily realities: costume designer Guy imagines sewing dresses in Paris while Delia brings family planning centers to the community. But sparks fly when Angel encounters Alabama-transplant Leland, tossing all of their aspirations into jeopardy. The Harlem Renaissance is the backdrop of Pearl Cleage’s poignant drama, and though “the Great Depression has crashed the party, the creative spirit is not easily quelled” (*Los Angeles Times*).

***The Nacirema Society***

Directed by Lili-Anne Brown

September 16 - October 15

Goodman Theatre (170 N. Dearborn)

It’s 1964 Montgomery, Alabama, and the Nacirema Society prepares for its annual introduction of six elegant African-American debutantes to a world of prosperity, privilege and social responsibility. This centennial year, the Society’s grande dame, Grace Dunbar, will have nothing less than perfection for her granddaughter Gracie’s debut. And with young love brewing, old family skeletons rattling, national media attention abounding and a blackmail plot bubbling…what would dare go awry? The Goodman is grateful for the support of JP Morgan Chase & Co. (Lead Corporate Sponsor) and Allstate (Major Corporate Sponsor). *For images, bios and additional information about the artists, visit the* [*Play Detail Page*](https://www.goodmantheatre.org/show/the-nacirema-society/)

**STAGED READINGS**

***Bourbon at the Border***

Directed by Lauren Wells-Mann

September 19 at 7:30pm

MPAACT at the Greenhouse Theater Center (2257 N. Lincoln)

When May and Charles join hundreds of Americans in a massive voter registration drive in 1964 Mississippi, they could not imagine the violence that would meet them there. Years later, they are still searching for healing after that "Freedom Summer." *Bourbon at the Border* remembers the unsung heroes of the civil rights movement and honors the sacrifice and price they paid.

***Pointing at the Moon***

Directed by Lydia R. Diamond

September 28 at 7pm

Goodman Theatre (170 N. Dearborn)

Jenny Anderson is a well-respected 50-something scholar, literary critic and tenured college faculty member who finds herself reluctantly drawn into the swirl of change post-2016 American Presidential election. Despite best intentions to stay above the fray, she suddenly finds everything she’s worked for threatened by efforts to censor and suppress creative work—including her own. Late one night, a young activist shows up on her doorstep with an urgent request for help, and Jenny must choose between her own comfort and her deeply held beliefs about the nature of freedom.

***Mad at Miles***

Directed by Daryl D. Brooks

October 2 at 6pm (cocktail reception, cash bar) 7pm performance featuring Chicago West Community Music Center

Black Ensemble Theater (4450 N. Clark)

Distinguished performer, playwright and producer Jackie Taylor stars in a reading of Cleage’s *Mad at Miles*—a moving choreopoem that gives voice to the difficult subject of women abuse and empowerment—with appearances from other Chicago spoken-word artists and featuring music by Chicago West Community Music Center, led by Darlene Sandifer and Howard Sandifer.

***Chain***

Reading + Art Exhibit

Directed by Ted Williams III

October 6 at 7pm

eta Creative Arts Foundation (7558 S. South Chicago)

Rosa Jenkins is 16-years-old, foul-mouthed and addicted to crack–and currently chained to a radiator, in a desperate intervention attempt from her parents. Inspired by real-life events, *Chain* presents the realities of addiction from a clear-eyed, unsentimental and startlingly humorous perspective. Following the staged reading, stay for a discussion and the opportunity to browse artwork in the gallery. Content Advisory: Adult language and frank descriptions of drug abuse, sexual content and abusive relationships between parents and children.

***Angry, Raucous and Shamelessly Gorgeous***

Directed by Ericka Ratcliff

October 8 at 2pm

Congo Square Theatre (Location TBA)

Following a 25-year self-imposed exile, actress Anna Campbell returns to the U.S. when her ground-breaking Black feminist theater piece—monologues performed in the nude—is announced for a major revival. But what promises to be a triumphant homecoming goes sideways when the diva discovers that a younger actress (and adult entertainer) has been cast to recreate her legendary performance. In this bold and funny story of ambition, post-feminism and who has a right to tell our stories, two women of different generations must confront assumptions about each other, and themselves, in time for opening night.

***A Song for Coretta***

Directed by Malkia Stampley

Definition Theatre (Location TBA)

It’s close to midnight as five determined, disparate Black women at the end of a long line of mourners at Ebenezer Baptist Church share stories while waiting to pay respect to the widow of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. An inspiring tribute to Coretta Scott King (1927 - 2006), “Pearl Cleage’s lovely, image-soaked testament to the civil rights icon brims with wit, personality and life-affirming energy” (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*).

***What I Learned in Paris***

Directed by TaRon Patton

October 14 at 6pm

Goodman Theatre (170 N. Dearborn)

Pearl Cleage’s funny and insightful tangled web of romantic intrigue is set against the backdrop of Maynard Jackson’s historic win as Atlanta’s first African American mayor. Lawyer J.P. Madison is riding high after his hard-fought election victory, celebrating with his new wife, his stalwart campaign manager and his junior partner. But when his ex-wife sweeps back into town, bringing with her the temptation of knowledge from far-flung corners of the world, each character must confront their expectations, obligations and human emotions—with the pull and tug that destiny has on our lives.

**WORKSHOPS, EVENTS AND CONVERSATIONS**

**“Chicago’s Black Jewels”**

Pre-Show Affinity Space and Reception

September 16 at 6pm

Goodman Theatre (170 N. Dearborn)

Pearl Cleage’s body of work offers roles and opportunities of all genres for Black actresses. Hosted by artist Kelcey Anya, the Goodman invites these talented women–Chicago’s jewels–to gather, uplift and celebrate prior to the first preview of The Nacirema Society. Light appetizers and drinks will be served. The reception is free with RSVP (space is limited) and discounted $30 tickets to the performance are available for purchase.

**Divine 9 Night**

Pre-Show Reception and Performance

September 23 at 6pm followed by *The Nacirema Society* at 7:30pm

$50 (Reception and Performance)

Goodman Theatre (170 N. Dearborn)

Celebrate the dynamic culture and legacy of the Black Greek Letter Organizations of the National Pan-Hellenic Council, collectively known as The Divine 9. Represent in your organization’s apparel while you mingle with other sororities and fraternities at a pre-show reception, including complimentary hors d’oeuvres and drinks, followed by the performance.

**Behind the Curtain: *The Nacirema Society***

Presented by Goodman Theatre

September 24 at 4:30pm

Goodman Theatre (170 N. Dearborn)

Join the creative forces behind The Nacirema Society for a lively, wide-ranging discussion about this Chicago-premiere production’s journey to the stage, and the enduring relevance of Pearl Cleage’s work in our city and beyond.

**In Conversation with Pearl Cleage: Playwright, Poet, and Author**

A Zoom Discussion

Presented by Remy Bumppo Theatre Company and American Writers Museum

September 26 at 6pm

In partnership with the American Writers Museum, Remy Bumppo hosts a conversation with Pearl Cleage over Zoom. Artistic Director Marti Lyons sits down with Ms. Cleage for a chat about her career and impact.

**Between the Lines**

A lecture presented by Remy Bumppo Theatre Company

October 1 at 1:30pm

Theater Wit (1229 W. Belmont)

Dr. Martine Kei Green-Rogers, dramaturg for Blues for an Alabama Sky, presents a lecture on the themes related to the play, and participates in a talkback with artists and audience following the performance.

***Letters, Potions and Promises***

A Writing Workshop presented by Goodman Theatre and Remy Bumppo Theatre Company

Led by Dr. Martine Kei Green-Rogers and Lachrisa Grandberry

October 3 and 7 at 6pm at Remy Bumppo (3759 N. Ravenswood)

October 10 at 6pm at Goodman Theatre (170 N. Dearborn)

Twelve early-career and emerging women and femme BIPOC writers are invited to a three-day deep-dive into the work of Pearl Cleage, with each day led by a different facilitator. Apply now to join this affinity space for writers of all disciplines to find community, inspiration and discover new ways of approaching work through the lineage of a Black American writer.

**From Delia’s Clinic to CARLA: The Fight for Reproductive Rights**

A panel discussion presented by Remy Bumppo Theatre Company

October 14 at 5pm

Theater Wit (1229 W. Belmont)

Journalist Natalie Moore and members of the Chicago Abortion Fund join Remy Bumppo Creative Producer Christina Casano for a discussion, delving into *Blues for an Alabama Sky*, the history of reproductive rights and the work currently being done in Illinois and beyond.

**ABOUT THE PEARL CLEAGE FESTIVAL PARTNERS**

As one of the most unique Chicago museums downtown, the **American Writers Museum**’s mission is to celebrate the enduring influence of American writers on our history, identity, culture, and daily lives. As the only museum devoted to American writers and their works, AWM connects visitors with their favorite authors and writings from more than five centuries, while inspiring the discovery of new works of every type – poetry, lyrics, speeches, drama, fiction, nonfiction, journalism, and more.

**Black Ensemble Theater** (BET), founded in 1976 by the phenomenal actress, producer, and playwright Jackie Taylor, has grown from a small community arts organization to a vibrant nationally and internationally renowned arts institution. A leader and innovator in the African-American and mainstream arts communities, Black Ensemble Theater is recognized as one of the most diverse theaters in the country, producing excellent musical theater.

**Chicago West Community Music Center**, a 501c3 non-profit organization located in East Garfield Park, provides music education and performance opportunities to children and families in underserved communities in Chicago and the Western Suburbs. The mission of CWCMC is to "Enhance Lives and Community Through Music." Our goal is to reduce the music related achievement gaps between minority and non-minority students and between economically disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers.

**Congo Square Theatre Company** is an ensemble dedicated to producing transformative work rooted in the African Diaspora. Congo Square is a haven for artists of color to challenge and redefine the theatrical canon by amplifying and creating stories that reflect the reach and complexities of Black Culture and is one of only two African American Actors’ Equity theater companies in Chicago. Founded in 1999 with a mission to provide a platform for Black artists to present work that exemplified the majesty, diversity, and intersectionality of stories from the African Diaspora, Congo Square’s guiding principles are radical generosity, radical community, and radical expansion.

**eta Creative Arts Foundation** was incorporated in 1971 as a non-profit, tax exempt organization to provide training and performance opportunities for youth and adults.  In the past 52 years, eta has evolved to become a recognized cultural treasure not only in the city of Chicago, but nationally and internationally. The organization has a commitment to the production of new works that “tell our story” in the first voice. eta houses a 200-seat theater, art studio and event space with stage.  Our annual programming features five plays, 8-week Summer Arts camp for the youth, Multiple pop-up workshops, acting, dance and playwriting classes for young adults and a host of community events and performances.

The **Ma’at Production Association of Afrikan Centered Theater (MPAACT)** is a professional, not-for-profit theater association founded in 1990. Our mission is to develop, nurture, and sustain original Afrikan Centered Theater (ACT) as a multi-disciplinary art form of American Theater. ACT is a genre of artistic expression grounded in the many cultures and traditions of the Afrikan continent and its diaspora. With a vision focused upon new works and collaborative art, MPAACT shall produce and educate with the goal of bringing forth an understanding and appreciation of Afrikan Centered Theater and its inter-related disciplines.

**Definition Theatre** celebrates stories created with, inspired by, and intended for people and communities of color. Through the act of making, Definition expands perspectives, stewards resources, and bridges the possibility found at the intersection of art, innovation, and education.

**Remy Bumppo** **Theatre Company** expands and enriches our community’s view of the world, and our own, by producing both the great plays of the past and the important plays of today. Our critically and publicly respected reputation is built on our consistent, high-quality presentations of the works of seminal playwrights, staged intimately and with the focus on expressing complex ideas in a clear, entertaining and moving manner. An ensemble theatre founded in 1996, we author a more humane culture as we listen to, and seek to understand, the voices, the ideas, and the stories of one another.

Chicago’s theater since 1925, **Goodman Theatre** is a not-for-profit arts and community organization in the heart of the Loop, distinguished by the excellence and scope of its artistic programming and community engagement. Led by Artistic Director **Susan V. Booth** and Executive Director/CEO **Roche Schulfer**, the theater’s artistic priorities include new play development (more than 150 world or American premieres), large scale musical theater works and reimagined classics. Artists and productions have earner two Pulitzer Prizes, 22 Tony Awards and more than 160 Jeff Awards, among other accolades. The Goodman is the first theater in the world to produce all 10 plays in August Wilson’s “American Century Cycle.” Its longtime annual holiday tradition *A Christmas Carol*, now in its fifth decade, has created a new generation of theatergoers in Chicago. The Goodman also frequently serves as a production and program partner with national and international companies and Chicago’s Off-Loop theaters.

Using the tools of theatrical practice, the Goodman’s Education and Engagement programs aim to develop generations of citizens who understand and empathize with cultures and stories of diverse voices. The Goodman’s Alice Rapoport Center for Education and Engagement is the home of these programs, which are offered for Chicago youth—85% of whom come from underserved communities—schools and life-long learners.

Goodman Theatre was built on the traditional homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi Nations. We recognize that many other Nations consider the area we now call Chicago as their traditional homeland—including the Myaamia, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sac and Fox, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Wea, Kickapoo and Mascouten—and remains home to many Native peoples today. While we believe that our city’s vast diversity should be reflected on the stages of its largest theater, we acknowledge that our efforts have largely overlooked the voices of our Native peoples. This omission has added to the isolation, erasure and harm that Indigenous communities have faced for hundreds of years. We have begun a more deliberate journey towards celebrating Native American stories and welcoming Indigenous communities.

Goodman Theatre was founded by William O. Goodman and his family in honor of their son Kenneth, an important figure in Chicago’s cultural renaissance in the early 1900s. The Goodman family’s legacy lives on through the continued work and dedication of Kenneth’s family, including Albert Ivar Goodman, who with his late mother, Edith-Marie Appleton, contributed the necessary funds for the creation on the new Goodman center in 2000. **Julie Danis** is Chair

of Goodman Theatre’s Board of Trustees, **Lorrayne Weiss** is Women’s Board President and **Kelli Garcia** is President of the Scenemakers Board for young professionals.

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