AFRICAN DIASPORA IN HARMONY

COMMUNITY REPORT

PART OF TAKING OUR PLACE CENTERSTAGE

CELEBRATING THE RICH ARTISTIC TRADITIONS OF COMMUNITIES OF AFRICAN ANCESTRY

ORDWAY
Just as **HARMONY** reminds each note, tone or chord of its **INTERCONNECTEDNESS**, so does Mama Africa resonate a melody in her descendants, possessed by a spirit of **RESILIENCY** and togetherness as a litany for survival.
Taking Our Place Centerstage:
**AFRICAN DIASPORA IN HARMONY**
A Retrospective

**WRITTEN BY**
Leah Nelson and Sherine Onukwuwe

**EDITED BY**
Shelley Quiela, Dayna Martinez, Robin P. Hickman, Jenea Rewertz-Targui, Victoria Menchaca

**Ordway Center for the Performing Arts**

**DESIGN BY**
Jen Clough

**Ordway Center for the Performing Arts**

Additional Support provided by FRED C. AND KATHERINE B. ANDERSEN FOUNDATION, HUGH J. ANDERSEN FOUNDATION, LILLIAN WRIGHT & C. EMIL BERGLUND FOUNDATION, BEST BUY CHILDREN’S FOUNDATION, CURTIS L. CARLSON FAMILY FOUNDATION, MARGARET H. AND JAMES E. KELLEY FOUNDATION, INC., KOPP FAMILY FOUNDATION, RBC FOUNDATION - USA, THE PENTAIR FOUNDATION, TARGET, THOMSON REUTERS, ARCHIE D. AND BERTHA H. WALKER FOUNDATION, WARREN FOUNDATION

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THE ORDWAY IS A NONPROFIT, COMMUNITY SUPPORTED CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION.

**ORDWAY MISSION**
The Ordway is a driver for the artistic vitality of our community by hosting, presenting and creating performing arts and educational programs that engage artists and enrich diverse audiences.

**PHOTOS BY SHERINE ONUKWUWE, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.**

This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support Grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

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### TAKING OUR PLACE CENTERSTAGE

#### AFRICAN DIASPORA IN HARMONY

Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, together with members of the African and African-American communities, is committed to continuing a partnership of creative programming, education, and entertainment that inspires us all.

In October 2010, the Ordway in collaboration with SoulTouch Productions launched Taking Our Place Centerstage (TOPC). In partnership with communities of African ancestry, the initiative is dedicated to providing artistic, educational, and economic engagement to the Twin Cities area. TOPC and the Ordway continued its collaborative work in 2014 with the celebration of *The African Diaspora in Harmony* (ADIH), a comprehensive set of performances within the Target® World Music & Dance (WMD) series highlighting the varied arts from across the African cultural existence.

TOPC: ADIH commemorated the rich artistic traditions of communities of African ancestry through world-class performances, workshops, and lecture-demonstrations led by professional artists, a two-week art exhibition, as well as social gatherings and community conversations.

“Throughout this season, we are all on a journey that inspires, uplifts and entertains – a journey made possible through artistic and educational programming designed and executed in partnership with community leaders and artists. This work is only possible because of the strong foundation that has been laid by our partners past and present. Please join us in celebrating their legacy through the reflection of African diaspora performance and events.”

**Patricia A. Mitchell**
President and CEO (former), the Ordway

“As a child, two precious gifts of wisdom from my mother were, “take your rightful place in the world,” and “we are African people, be proud”. It is a divine honor to shepherd Taking Our Place Centerstage and this celebration of glory and greatness. When the African Diaspora is in harmony, all of our lives are richer.”

**Robin P. Hickman**
Community Partnership Advisor and Taking Our Place Centerstage Director CEO, SoulTouch Productions
FRIENDS OF THE DIASPORA: 
THE BEGINNING

Every year, the Ordway curates its Target© WMD series that brings together a diverse, global community of creators and performers to share the magic and wonder of their cultures and ancestry.

TOPC: ADIH was developed in order to explore the rich cultural heritage of artistic expression within the African Diaspora, with lead support from the Mardag Foundation and Target. The journey began with a reception summoning friends of the Diaspora including community leaders, invested entrepreneurs, media partners, and members of the artistic community on October 25, 2013.

The Friends of the Diaspora reception offered an opportunity to gather and discuss the vision for the upcoming program series. Held in the Drake Room, The Flamingo restaurant catered an ambrosial selection of Ethiopian delicacies, while Bouquets by Carolyn adorned the space with gorgeous floral arrangements. Ordway President and CEO, Patricia Mitchell warmly welcomed the group and introduced the founder of TOPC, Robin Hickman.

“A single bracelet does not jingle.”
— Congolese proverb

Hickman set the tone for a series that would place African and African-American culture center stage by emphasizing the importance of valuing one’s own culture and recognizing its wealth of intellect, wisdom, and artistic value. TOPC: ADIH Program Manager, Leah Nelson—dressed in a stylishly colorful yellow and green tie-dyed caftan and head wrap—gave the intimate gathering an outline of the programmed series’ intentions for community outreach through social media and through community-based partnerships to promote the variety of exciting workshops, master classes, lectures, cultural conversations, performances, and the fine Art Exhibit. Additionally, logistical assistance for the program was provided by TOPC: ADIH Program Assistant, Lyriq La’Shay.
THE VISION COUNCIL

Derived from Máscaras y Milagros: Mexican Arts in Minnesota—a previous series with enriching and stimulating artistic programming that celebrated Mexican and Mexican-American identity and artistic expression—TOPC: ADIH formed a Vision Council of community members in order to create authentic community ownership and establish the tone for the work. Once identified and recruited, the Vision Council convened over the course of the series to envision and plan TOPC: ADIH’s layout. The Golden Thyme Café and The Flamingo Restaurant, two local black-owned businesses, graciously accommodated the group. The Vision Council also met at the Ordway and the University of Minnesota’s Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center.

The Vision Council proved to be instrumental throughout the community engagement series that ran from January 2014 to June 2014. Vision Council members helped Ms. Hickman and Ms. Nelson plan arts-based learning opportunities; served as TOPC: ADIH media ambassadors; introduced artists at performances; identified Ordway Extra (pre-show discussion) contributors, artists, and other community connections; provided video and photographic documentation; curated an art exhibit; and helped to promote the show and boost attendance as well as many other invaluable undertakings.
**VISION COUNCIL MEMBERS**

“I was honored to be part of this new initiative with the Ordway that places African and African-American culture at the center and prioritizes our contribution to music, dance, and theater.” — Nneka Onyilofor, Vision Council Member

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**TITILAYO BEDIAKO** is the founder and executive director of WE WIN Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to the academic and social success of all children. WE WIN’s programs are tailored to instill pride, confidence, increased academic abilities, and social skills in children by providing them knowledge and experiences, which honor and celebrate their cultural roots. Ms. Bediako, formerly an educator with Minneapolis Public Schools, received the 2002 National Education Association’s Trensholm Award, which is awarded to only two educators in the United States dedicated to at-risk youth.

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**MAHMOUD EL-KATI** is a lecturer, writer, and commentator on the African-American experience. He specializes in African-American history and advocates institution building within cultural communities. A Professor Emeritus of history at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, and a frequent commentator through a variety of mass media outlets locally and nationally, El-Kati has written articles, essays, and reviews that deal with a variety of issues including the myth of “race,” Ebonics, gangs and Black youth, education, African Americans, sports, and other issues. He currently lives in the Rondo neighborhood, St. Paul’s historic Black community.

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**TOM GITAA** is the founder, president and publisher of MSHale, the leading newspaper in the Midwest United States dedicated to covering the African immigrant community with a primary focus on the state of Minnesota. He is also the Secretary of the Board for The Minnesota Multicultural Media Consortium (MMMC), which is the service arm of minority publishers and broadcasters in Minnesota.

The MMMC was founded in 1992 to enable ethnic media to amalgamate readership and listenership to leverage increased revenue for member newspapers and broadcast properties.

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**ANDREA JENKINS** is a poet; writer; multimedia, visual, and performance artist; and author of two chapbooks, “tributaries: poems celebrating black history” and “Pieces of A Scream”. She has been a part of the local poetry community for several years, earning awards, fellowships, and commissions during that time, including the 2002 Loft Literary Center Mentorship Series Award. Andrea is a Senior Policy Aide to the 8th Ward City Council Member, Elizabeth Glidden, and serves on the boards of OutFront Minnesota, Forecast Public Art, and SMARTS. Andrea co-curates Intermedia Arts’ Queer Voices Reading Series with John Medeiros, one of the longest running LGBT reading series in the country.

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**SHEGITU KEBEDE** is the co-owner and manager of Flamingo Restaurant in the Hamline-University neighborhood of St. Paul. She is a longtime volunteer and board member of the International Institute of Minnesota (www.iimn.org), which aids immigrants and helps them assimilate to life in the United States. In 2006, Kebede was awarded the McKnight Foundation’s Virginia McKnight Binger Human Service Award; while in 2011, she was featured in the Minnesota History Center exhibit, “The Value of One Life.” Shegitu has written her powerful story of immigration to the US as a refugee from Ethiopia in a 2011 book, Visible Strengths, Hidden Scars.

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**SHERINE ONUKWUWE** is a screenwriter, filmmaker, film critic and wanna-be novelist who strives to conquer the artists’ inner S self-sabotage. Her passion for writing blossomed after falling in love with the 1970’s hit film musical, The Wiz. Later, realizing that the story was an adaptation initially written for white characters, she began to explore writing as resistance to a Eurocentric context imagining Black experiences. Through her work, she examines Black vernacular, thought, and expression from the perspective of Black people. She is the founder of SoulEye Films.

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**NNEKA ONYILOFOR** currently holds a full-time position as an Outreach Counselor at the University of Minnesota and an adjunct faculty position at McNally Smith, where she teaches Diaspora of African Music. She was a freelance writer for the Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder Newspaper and has been published in various local publications such as the African News Journal and the St. Paul Almanac. Nneka also was the founder of Moonlight Poetry, an open mike venue in Minneapolis. She participated in the 2008 Givens Black Writer’s Retreat in Minnesota and is a program director of African Global Roots, a locally-based networking and entertainment group.

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**SHHERINE ONYILOFOR** currently holds a full-time position as an Outreach Counselor at the University of Minnesota and an adjunct faculty position at McNally Smith, where she teaches Diaspora of African Music. She was a freelance writer for the Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder Newspaper and has been published in various local publications such as the African News Journal and the St. Paul Almanac. Nneka also was the founder of Moonlight Poetry, an open mike venue in Minneapolis. She participated in the 2008 Givens Black Writer’s Retreat in Minnesota and is a program director of African Global Roots, a locally-based networking and entertainment group.

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**MARIA ISA PEREZ** was born and raised in the Twin Cities to Nuyorican parents. She is an emcee, singer, and songwriter recognized for her dedication towards celebrating her cultural diversity through music and political activism. Following her nomination in 2006 for the Minnesota Music Award’s “Best Hip-Hop Artist” category, Isa released her first independent album M.I. Split Personalities in May of 2007. Since then, she has been promoting her music in the Twin Cities, Puerto Rico, and around the nation.

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**HAWONA SULLIVAN JANZEN** is the gallery curator and special projects coordinator at the University of Minnesota’s Urban Research & Outreach/Engagement Center. She is a poet, non-fiction writer, and experienced instructor whosework focuses on human emotions with a special emphasis on grief, traumatic loss, and love. Hawona is also the Co-Chair for the Ubuntu Council for the African American Leadership Forum. Group members work to enrich and infuse family, culture, and spirituality-friendly practices throughout the work of the African American Leadership Forum.

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**advocates reception**

On January 7, 2014, about a month before the performance series commenced, Ordway’s marketing team, TOPC: ADIH staff, and the Vision Council organized an evening focused on the theatrical Broadway classic Porgy and Bess and catered by Brasa, a Creole style restaurant in the Twin Cities. Additional community members were enlisted as Advocates in order to promote and distribute materials for upcoming TOPC: ADIH events. In exchange, each Advocate received two complimentary tickets to one of the series’ performances of their choice. Ordway Vice President of Programming and Producing Artistic Director, James Rocco, talked briefly about George & Ira Gershwin; in 1935, the Gershwin brothers wrote and composed the opera Porgy & Bess as well as a slew of other jazz compositions and musicals. Then, the young virtuoso Cameron Wright commanded the gathering with his soulfully adept voice as he crooned one of the most popular songs of the opera, “Summertime.”

"The partnership between the Ordway and the African community is an example of what is possible when people work together and all are allowed to be leaders with their voices not only heard but their recommendations implemented for the benefit of all. Our children learned, and they felt better about themselves as a result of learning from and interacting with successful professionals who look like them… The partnership must continue. Taking Our Place Centerstage: The African Diaspora in Harmony is an example of Black Excellence!" — Titilayo Bediako, Vision Council Member
The community was invited to participate in an artmaking workshop on January 30, 2014, at The Plymouth Avenue Art Studio in Minneapolis owned by artist and educator Shirley Jones. They worked collaboratively to create large scale African Masks as part of an installation in the Movement, Sound and Memory: Perspectives from the African Diaspora fine arts exhibit displayed in the lobbies at the Ordway.
MOVEMENT,
SOUND AND
MEMORY

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

The fine arts exhibit, Movement, Sound and Memory: Perspectives from the African Diaspora, was on display to ticket holders of performances from February 7 to February 19, 2014, in the Ordway’s Marzitelli Foyer. Five Twin Cities-based artists — Shirley Jean Jones, Catherine Kennedy, Douglas R. Ewart, Sankara Djeki, and Lorenzo Crockett — shared their work inspired by WMD performances, Rennie Harris Puremovement, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and Maria de Barros on stage in February. The exhibit was curated by Hawona Sullivan Janzen and Roderic “hernub” Southall, with guidance and input from the Vision Council and Community Advisors.

The creative and instinctual sensibility of the TOPC: ADIH curatorial team, comprised of Vision Council member Hawona Sullivan Janzen and Director of the Obsidian Arts Center Roderic ‘hernub’ Southall, helped produce a dynamic art exhibit. Janzen and Southall presented their ideas to the Vision Council and engaged with the Production Staff in order to coordinate and mount an impressive show reflecting a wide range of ideas, artistry, and craftsmanship. Movement, Sound and Memory: Perspectives from the African Diaspora featured visual artists, whose mediums were as varied as their origins of African heritage, who reflected the exhibit’s vision.

Hawona Sullivan Janzen is the curator and special projects coordinator for the University of Minnesota’s Urban Research & Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC). She manages the UROC gallery, serves as a part of the curatorial team for the Minnesota African American Museum, and chairs the African American Leadership Forum’s “Ubuntu Council.”

Roderic “hernub” Southall is the director of the Obsidian Arts Center, which hopes to increase awareness of African-American art and its artists. Since 1991, Southall has been an active part of the Minnesota visual arts community his work with many organizations including Twin Cities Juneteenth Festival, Intermedia Arts, Northside Arts Collective and COMPAS.

PHOTOS: sepia queen
Sankara Djeki was born in Douala, Cameroon, on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean. From an early age, language, art, and travel heavily influenced his identity.

In the early ’70s, he moved to Le Bourget, a town on the outskirts of Paris, with his family. Later on, as a teenager, Djeki returned to Cameroon. As he wandered between French-speaking countries, African cultures, and the American dream, he built bridges across creative traditions and learned art by doing and improvising on his journey.

In his work, Djeki conveys movement through poems, basic shapes, found objects, accidental materials, and symbols in a street art, afrobeat style called matilanamusiki.

Djeki currently resides in south Minneapolis, with his wife and three children.
Shirley Jean Jones is an artist and educator, who resides on the north side of Minneapolis. She was born in Chicago and studied at Eastern Illinois University, Chicago State University, and the University of Minnesota. Jones completed her MFA at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

Jones taught for many years in the public school, recently retiring from Central High School in Saint Paul, and continues to provide art classes to neighbourhood children at her Plymouth Avenue Art Studio. She spends much of her time creating, exhibiting, and selling innovative art pieces and jewelry.

Shirley’s illustrious career has been sprinkled with exhibitions at the Phipps Art Center, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Walker Art Center, Jahn’s Art Gallery, and the annual Juneteenth Celebration in Minneapolis. She describes her jewelry as “small sculptures” reflecting her pursuit of the unusual and her use of found objects and of mixed mediums.

Most of her work holds a deeper meaning embedded in her African roots, the natural world, and the power of the spiritual.
Growing up in Northern California during the mid ’60s and early ’70s, artist Lorenzo Crockett found himself in the midst of a hub of activity. San Francisco and its sister cities, Oakland and Berkeley, kept the Bay Area buzzing with police violence, student protests, and uncertainty.

For Crockett, those events and the colorful characters who lived through those turbulent times shaped his artistry, encouraging his fearless approach toward a blank canvas with heavy textures, bold backgrounds, and odd colored schemes. Crockett’s art reflects freedom of people, places, and things caught in a strange living purgatory of post radical/revolution and pre-hip hop/urban ideology.

In addition to Lorenzo’s several commissioned pieces, his art has been featured at both the Twin Cities and Selby Jazz Festivals, the Black History Expo, the Powderhorn Art Festival, the North Side Flow, and Vocal Essence’s Tribute to Marion Anderson at the Ordway.
Perhaps best known as a composer, improviser, sculptor, and mask and instrument maker, Douglas R. Ewart is also an educator, lecturer, arts organization consultant, and all-around visionary.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Ewart immigrated to Chicago, Illinois, in 1963. Ewart earned a prestigious U.S.-Japan Creative Arts Fellowship in 1987 to study both modern Japanese culture and the traditional Buddhist shakuhachi flute and to give public performances while in Japan.

He has taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago since 1990 and serves on advisory boards for The National Endowment for the Arts, Meet the Composer (New York City), and Arts Midwest. Additionally, he is the past chairman of the internationally renowned Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.

Ewart maintains several musical ensembles—Inventions, Stringnets, the Nyahbingi Drum Choir—and the Clarinet Choir and released music on his own record label, Aarawak Records. He has created new or revised musical forms, such as his suite “Music from the Bamboo Forest,” which is in a state of constant evolution.
Born in Liberia, West Africa, artist Catherine Kennedy left the country in the early 1990s during the Liberian Civil War. After 10 years as a refugee in the Ivory Coast, Kennedy relocated to the United States to reunite with her father and her grandmother who had refugee status.

Kennedy’s work explores her experiences as a displaced person. She addresses the contemporary and historical paths between the Americas and West Africa, such as the triangular trade and paths that bring African refugees and immigrants to the United States.

Kennedy approaches her art subjects using memory and empathy of others’ experiences as well as her own. This framework creates an opportunity to embrace the strength and hope that it is usually not seen in such complex or negative situations.
RENNE HARRIS: PUREMOVEMENT
FEBRUARY 5-7, 2014

Rennie Harris PUREMOVEMENT (RHPM) has emerged as an international hip-hop dance ambassador, providing audiences with a sincere view of the essence and spirit of hip-hop, rather than the commercially exploited stereotypes most often presented by the media. Harris founded RHPM based on the belief that hip-hop is the most important original expression of a new generation, with the unique ability to express universal themes that extend beyond racial, religious, and economic boundaries.

“All creatures dance, but humans have a panoply of movement vocabularies influenced by history and surroundings.”
— Rennie Harris, Dance Company founder & choreographer

6,457 students and teachers attended 4 RHPM school performances
Following one of the student performances, RHPM company members joined 30 ninth & tenth grade students along with teachers from North Academy of Arts and Communication (NACC) in a facilitated reflection session led by artists Becca Barniskis and Leah Nelson in response to the performance. This cohort participated in Ordway’s Student Leaders in Arts & Media program and worked with Barniskis and Nelson during a residency to learn how to observe artwork more carefully in order to better understand its meaning.

All NACC students attended the performance, wrote response pieces, and shared them with parents during National African American Parent Involvement Day at NAAC.

MASTER CLASS with Rennie Harris PUREMOVEMENT
RHPM’s masterclass taught by Rodney Hill gave participants the opportunity to explore social dances of the ’80s, ’90s and today.

Additionally, the B-Boying knowledge session gave 16 people the opportunity to explore and celebrate the legacy of hip-hop with leading local practitioners. Hip-hop specialists Aneka McMullen, Madeline Howie, Chevell Taylor, and Dovan Kingsley convened to share different styles such as social, popping, locking, and b-boying and to converse about hip-hop history. Roosevelt Mansfield also known as DJ Digie played and explained the 40 years of music that influenced the dance styles.
ORDWAY EXTRA: Hip-Hop Philosophy: A Way of Life

The pre-show discussion moderated by Leah Nelson, TOCP: ADIH Program Manager, featured artists who shared the influence of hip-hop culture in their lives and practice, including Karla Nweje, dancer, choreographer, and artistic director of Real Artistry; Herbert Johnson, dancer, choreographer, and artistic director of SHAPESHIFT; Jason Noer aka B-boy J-Sun, dancer, choreographer, and creator of GROUNDBREAKER BATTLE FESTIVAL; Kevin Moore aka KAOZ, emcee, playwright, actor, activist, and HIV health educator; and Roosevelt Mansfield aka DJ Digie (left), UPROCK, ABSTRACT PACK, emcee, and Hip-Hop Archivist.

RENNIE HARRIS PUREMOVEMENT PERFORMED AT THE ORDWAY ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2014.

TOCP: ADIH’s first performance, RHPM, represented solely one of the African Diaspora’s diverse cultures and traditions. RHPM delivered gravity-defying movement resembling a moving piece of visual art for 746 people during the public performance. RHPM brought their show to the Ordway with repertoire that covered many different styles within the hip-hop genre of dance. From breakdancing to toprock and downrock, RHPM fired up the audience with their electrifying show.

Rennie Harris PUREMOVEMENT ARTIST TALKBACK & POST SHOW PARTY

After the dancing, the kinetic energy made its way into the Marzitelli Foyer for the post-show party. It began with a brief but engaging talk-back with the Philadelphia-based dance company moderated by Aneka McMullen: dancer, choreographer, teacher, and artistic director of EPITOME NO QUESTION and Maia Maiden: dancer, choreographer, artistic director of CONCIOUSSPIRIT as hosts (above). During the conversation, audience members discovered that one of the RHPM dancers was hard of hearing and moves to the vibration of the music.
Four-time Grammy Award winning Ladysmith Black Mambazo PERFORMED AT THE ORDWAY ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2014. 1,644 people attended the public performance Ladysmith Black Mambazo has been singing the story of South Africa for more than 40 years, gaining worldwide fame when Paul Simon featured the group on his 1986 album Graceland. Borrowing heavily from the traditional Zulu musical style of isicathamiya, which is based primarily on Zulu music and dance traditions, the group features stunning vocal harmonies, mouth percussion and cascading melodies accompanied by graceful choreography in order to spread the message of peace, love, and harmony.

During LBM’s sold-out concert, the audience erupted in a standing ovation when the ensemble dedicated a song in homage to Nelson Mandela. After their hypnotic performance, the group autographed CDs in the foyer and exchanged greetings and posed for pictures with musical admirers.

PHOTOS: JENEA REWERTZ-TARGUI

Ladysmith Black Mambazo company members pose in front of artist Lorenzo Crockett’s portrait of Nelson Mandela.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo visits Bruce Vento Elementary
In addition to their Performing Arts Classroom series performances for school children at the Ordway, Ladysmith Black Mambazo also performed and held a workshop at Bruce Vento Elementary for 150 students, parents, and teachers with a dance opening by Marsha Carter/Unity in Network Praise dancers (above) on National African American Parent Involvement Day on February 10, 2014.
The pre-show discussion featured Dr. Leon Rodrigues and Sowah Mensah, where they shared knowledge of African music, led the audience in chorus, and shared stories of experience with Apartheid including specific songs that influenced revolutionary action. Hosted by TOPC: ADIH Program Manager, Leah Nelson.

After the show, there was a post-show party.

Dr. Leon Rodrigues (left) of Bethel University shared stories of his experiences with Apartheid and the struggles to free South Africa from a period of tyranny. He was joined by Ghana-born Professor Sowah Mensah (right) of Macalester College, who shared his independence history and knowledge of revolutionary African music and led us in closing with “Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika.”

Ladysmith Black Mambazo performed to enthusiastic crowds, delighting all with their athletic, synchronized movements and beautiful harmonies in their native Zulu language. The group’s wonderful sense of humor and infectious joy engaged the audience as students actively participated in call and response throughout the show.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo, the second performance in the series, played a timely role since the world was mourning the death of former South African President and freedom fighter Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela.

Ladysmith Black Mambazo exemplify how the Ordway actively creates and maintains connections with touring artists since LBM previously performed at the Ordway. Performing for a sold-out audience, they dedicated a song to Mandela, bringing the crowd to their feet.

While native Africans of the lower regions of the continent were engulfed in a war for their right to homeland and identity, liberatory music simultaneously was cultivated as fuel for the abolishment of Apartheid. In the tradition of Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, and others who used music as a chisel upon the rock of oppression, Lady Blacksmith Mambazo created an assortment of songs drawing from traditional Zulu music known as Isicathamiya. In 1986, LBM sang Nkosi Sekelel’iAfrika along with Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, and Paul Simon to a huge crowd at a Zimbabwean concert. At that time, the song was considered controversial; however, since then, it has been declared the South African National Anthem by the former and late president Nelson Mandela. The song fuses the former national anthem, “The Call of South Africa” with South Africa’s five different languages: Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Afrikaans, and English.

TOPC: ADIH Program Manager, Leah Nelson engaged the pre-show audience in a chant of liberation that was a staple of the Anti-Apartheid Movement. She reminded the crowd that while the music sounded relaxing, it was music for preparatory revolution. Nelson moderated a pre-show conversation and welcomed Native South African Dr. Leon Rodriguez of Bethel University and Professor Sowah Mensah of Macalester College to join her and reflect upon their experiences with Apartheid. They discussed the period of tyranny, musicology, and triumphs. In closing, all three speakers handed out the lyrics to the new South African National Anthem and asked the audience to stand in solidarity as they sang “Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika.”
Born in Senegal to Cape Verdean parents, Maria de Barros’ music transcends geography and language taking the listener on vivid travels through Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean, France and Spain while allowing the tradition and culture of her native Cape Verde to permeate. Described as a Cape Verdean Ella Fitzgerald with a Latin flair, Maria joyously sings about love and life in Spanish, English, and French and brings audiences to her world of African and Brazilian-inflected coladeiras and bluesy mornas.

Drummer and teaching artist Truth Maze (right) and hip-hop artist Maria Isa co-hosted an afternoon with 250 students at W.I.S.E. Academy School in Northeast Minneapolis. After a brief introduction and musical demonstration, they welcomed Maria de Barros and her accompanist to play and to reflect upon her inspiration and the multiple languages and sounds that influence her music.

De Barros additionally demonstrated how to play a conch shell and emphasized that creativity remains essential in creating music.

Karen Gregerson of W.I.S.E. Academy School in Northeast Minneapolis invited the artists as part of their Black History Month programming.

De Barros made another appearance at student matinee performances. She discussed the different influences informing her music, shared dances, and taught the students the names of musical instruments from her culture. Later that evening, Truth Maze interviewed Maria de Barros on his KFAI show. He played one of her tunes and invited the listening audience to attend her performance the following night.

Maria de Barros performed her fusion of many styles of music like Cabo Verdean, North and West African, Cuban, Argentinian, and Jazz.

The night of the de Barros’ performance was jam-packed with activity. The TOPC: ADH art exhibit closed; students from Kenwood school in Minneapolis stopped by backstage for a meet-and-greet; world dignitary and daughter of Bishop Desmond Tutu, Naomi Tutu was hosted in the Twin Cities by Youthprise President, Wokie Weah; audience members participated in a preshow discussion about the significance of oral traditions and family ties; and community members danced in a West African and Caribbean Cultural Influences Dance Workshop.

Through a partnership between Youthprise and TOPC, Tutu attended a reception at the Ordway in her honor. There, she was presented with a beautiful artistic portrait of Nelson Mandela created by visual artist Lorenzo Crockett. Mrs. Tutu briefly addressed those gathered on the upper level for a quick reception and then graciously introduced Maria de Barros to the energetic audience.

Youthprise and Ordway staff began collaborating in 2013 thanks for TOPC founder Robin Hickman. The two organizations found mutually reinforcing programming opportunities due to their complimentary commitments to youth engagement, community empowerment and the arts.
ORDWAY EXTRA: Passing It On: Oral Traditions and Family Ties

Ghanaian master drummer Fode Bangoura and his son Sara (pronounced Séda) summoned everyone to attention with the thunderous slaps of the djembe drums strapped to their shoulders. They galloped polyrhythmically towards each other from different directions, causing an involuntary bend in the knees and a rotation in the hips among members of the Mezzanine crowd. Soon after, people were looking for a place to set their drinks so they could put more effort into their groove. Leah Nelson welcomed and introduced all the panelists, which included the Bangoura’s, cultural catalyst and entrepreneur Elsa Vegas-Perez, her daughter Maria Isa Perez, performing artists, and Felipe Cuauhtli of the recording group Los Nativos. The discussion excavated rare gems of connection and African identity through the foundation of art, culture, family, and ancestral legacy.

The folks in the West African and Caribbean Cultural Influences in Dance Workshop worked up an intense sweat with a smile on their faces. Facilitated by Deja Stowers, Maria Isa Perez, Aiyana Machado, members of Voice of Culture Drum and Dance, and members of El Arco Iris, the workshop explored connections between cultures of the African Diaspora.

The dancers demonstrated West African Djembe dance techniques and traditional Puerto Rican music known as Bomba, which is a mix of African, Spanish, and Indigenous Taino Indian. The class concluded with a collaborative dance circle open to anyone inspired to shake a tail feather or two.


A local band from Minneapolis, Havana Hi-Fi, warmed up the dance floor for Cape Verdean songbird and five time Grammy® nominee, Maria de Barros. Their musical style brings honor to the traditional Cuban “Son” and other African influenced Latin sound.

Once de Barros emerged onto the stage, she enchanted listeners with her romantic voice and magnetic stage presence as she serenaded the audience in Cabo Verdes’ national language of Portuguese. Her collection of songs moved people to the awaiting dance floor where they stayed the rest of the night. At one point during the show, de Barros took the microphone into the crowd to join the dancers and a few of the TOPC: ADH’s Vision Council members.

Afterwards, Maria de Barros eagerly rushed to the Martezelli Foyer to socialize. She seemed as if she had welcomed attendees into her home for a dinner party because she exuded such compassion and hospitality. She picked up babies, took plenty of photos, and autographed CDs and other paraphernalia. Anytime that she performs at the Ordway will be like the return of a long-awaited old friend.
Choreographer and Artistic Director of EVIDENCE, a Dance Company, Ronald K. Brown (below, left) graced the Twin Cities with a pre-production visit to share his artistic vision for the movement in the piece and to engage the community in the movement vocabulary of the Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* that he was invited to re-imagine. After multiple visits to the region where the opera’s narrative originates, Mr. Brown was able to share the history that he had learned with the cast and infuse the choreography with culturally accurate historical movement, including mourning dances and grief dances of West Africa.

Dancer and choreographer Ronald K. Brown visited the Twin Cities and led several events surrounding The Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Not only is Mr. Brown the choreographer and founder the dance company, Evidence, but he also has created work for many other leading dance companies. Brown helped re-envision the *Porgy and Bess* production with help from his research in the Carolinas. While in the Twin Cities, Mr. Brown had dinner at Brasa with the Vision Council and friends, led a movement workshop and class at both Harvest Prep and the TU Dance Center, as well as took part in a conversation with Karla Nweje (above, right) before a performance of *Porgy and Bess*.

**MARCH 25-30, 2014**

9,916 people attended over 8 public performances
A revival of the classic work, the Ordway presented The Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess* to enthusiastic audiences. The story is set in Charleston’s fabled Catfish Row, where the character Bess struggles to break free from her scandalous past, and the only one who can rescue her is Porgy.

A mix of Vision Council members, local dancers, *Porgy & Bess* cast members, emerging choreographers, and Ordway support staff met for a wonderful evening with Ronald K. Brown, the choreographer of Gershwin’s *Porgy & Bess* (below). Brown radiated a magnanimous energy and warmth, not to mention that megawatt smile. He shared insights into his choreography process and his creative drive over a delicious plate of Brasa goodness. He circulated the table of roughly 20 people, ensuring he met everyone present, including the two-year-old beaming at him from a distance with admiration, as if she were familiar with his magnificent talent. Mr. Brown enjoyed the stimulating conversation until the last dish of collard greens and butter-honey cornbread was devoured.

The following morning, 400 third and fourth graders and their teachers at Seed Academy/Harvest Prep engaged with Mr. Brown as he drew upon his large West African repertoire of dance movements. Local accomplished dancer Kenna Cottman of Voice of Culture Drum and Dance, TOPC: ADH Program Manager Leah Nelson, and a lively sign language interpreter assisted Mr. Brown during his demonstration. The entire audience was transported to the Gold coast as the music filled the jam-packed gymnasium. A small group of steppers shared an impromptu moment to exhibit their skills and connect with the audience through dance.

A master class at TU Dance Center took close to 40 through the movement vocabulary that Mr. Brown studied in preparation for choreography of the production. Dancers moved across the floor quickly, mastering the intricate footwork and timing as they progressed (left, above).
**Porgy and Bess Post Show Party and Talk-Back**

Later that evening, Karla Nweje—dancer, choreographer and artistic director of Real Artistry—interviewed Ron K. Brown about his approach to re-imagining a classic with a 21st century cultural lens. The discussion was open and free to the TOPC: ADH community and all *Porgy and Bess* ticket holders.

Although one may have seen *Porgy and Bess* before, the ability to experience the brilliance of Ronald K. Brown added an entirely new element to the story. This deep and resonant performance of the classic opera revealed a complex understanding of the differing facets of African and American cultures. As wonderful on stage as they were offstage, the entire cast graciously engaged the audience in a Post-show Talkback and signed autographs for old and newfound fans. Afterwards, the TOPC: ADH community were invited to a special meet-and-greet with the immensely talented members of the company.

On the second performance night, a preshow focused on the contributions of African Americans on Broadway. We joined Austene Van, Tonia Hughes and Cameron Wright other Twin Cities’ based musical thespians as they performed excerpts from some of the greatest musicals of all time. During the course of the presentation, Robin P. Hickman and James Rocco entered the conversation, which evolved to include mentions of the great African-American Broadway artists that impacted to American Performing Arts.

The Flint Hills International Children’s Festival included performances by many artists, including the Washington D.C. based Step Afrika! (above), whose company members taught a master class open to community. Other TOPC highlights included Vision Council members and community partners introducing the performances, a visual art exhibition and performance by Douglas Ewart and friends, and CONTRA-TIEMPO workshops with Harvest Prep/SEED Academy, Voice of Culture at TU Dance Center, Fair Oaks Elementary, and Maxfield Elementary. With WE WIN INSTITUTE and Arlington Rec Center, community partners and members participated in a drum circle at an artist sharing hosted by Maria Isa. Teaching artists Sean Burns, Maia Maiden, and Karla Nweje led classes in schools as well as after school and out of school time programming.

Step Afrika! is the first professional company dedicated to the art of stepping, a traditional form of body percussion developed among
African American college students with its roots in South African gumboot dancing. Using only movement, stomps, claps, and chants to create a percussive dance experience like no other, Step Afrika! Enthralls and engages audiences with its highly visual rhythmic performances!

In contemporary America, stepping was popularized by African-American Greek organizations although its roots predate modern day fraternities and sororities. Step Afrika! is a Washington D.C. based dance company that celebrates the art of stepping and body percussion. This group’s athleticism and in sync rhythm kept the entire theater in a frenzy, especially since the majority of the audience was under the age of 12.

A Step Afrika! ensemble member instructed a master class open to the community, offering context and insight into the origin and significance of the movements. Step Afrika! provided the perfect addition to the TOPC: ADH series and Flint Hills International Children’s Festival.