



NEGRO ENSEMBLE COMPANY

MECCA IS BURNING

WORLD PREMIERE

WEDNESDAY, **FEBRUARY 15** @ 7:30 PM

THURSDAY, **FEBRUARY 16** @ 7:30 PM

FRIDAY, **FEBRUARY 17** @ 8 PM

SATURDAY, **FEBRUARY 18** @ 2 PM

SATURDAY, **FEBRUARY 18** @ 8 PM

Annenberg Center, Harold Prince Theatre

There will be an intermission.



This project is made possible with lead support by the William Penn Foundation, and is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts. | Additional support has been provided through an Extended Artist Residency grant from The Sachs Program for Arts Innovation. | The Negro Ensemble Company Residency in the 22/23 season is made possible in part with support provided by the Penn Live Arts Accelerator Program at the University of Pennsylvania. | The Negro Ensemble Company is the 22/23 season artist-in-residence of the Brownstein Residency for Artistic Innovation.

PROGRAM NOTES

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR Karen Brown

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS Tracy Mack, Jessica Prince

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER/SET DESIGNER Patrice Davidson

DIRECTOR Karen Brown

COLLABORATIVE PLAYWRIGHTS & POETS Cris Eli Blak, Karen Brown, Lisa McCree, Levy Lee Simon, Mona R. Washington

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER Fulton Hodges

DRAMATURG A. J. Muhammad

LIGHTING DESIGNER Melody A. Beal

SOUND DESIGNER David Wright

COSTUME DESIGNER Rhonda Lucas

GRAPHICS DESIGNER Damita Miles

PRESS REPRESENTATIVE Jonathan Slaff

Mecca is Burning is our perspective on the tenuous climate facing and plaguing our community in the current divisive political atmosphere. This new work, from the point of view of four Harlem families, presents the personal and universal realities of fear, anger, hope and love. We/They are just trying to live. This time is a time unlike any other in American society and *Mecca is Burning* is the journey of community and family. Actors, playwrights and poets, in concert, marking the passage of time and defining our present.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The mission of the **Negro Ensemble Company, Inc.** (NEC) is to provide African American, African and Caribbean professional artists with an opportunity to learn, to work, to grow and to be nurtured in the performing arts. The overall mission of the NEC is to present live theatre performances by and about Black people to a culturally diverse audience that is often under-served by the theatrical community.

Karen Brown (Executive Producer, Artistic Director, Director)

Brown has been Executive Director for the Negro Ensemble Company, Inc. for the past three years. Brown has worked as a stringer reporter for a daily paper and weekly paper and as a TV news associate producer. She began her theatrical career in theatre/arts administration with the Kalamazoo Civic Theater, where she was the second director/manager for the Black Civic for two seasons. She established the Inner City Youth Summer Theatre Project, generating successful proposals to the IBM Corporation, which ran for two consecutive summers. The project served 50 primarily African American children ages 5 to 18, giving instruction in theatre, creative writing, dance, voice and journalism. Brown became the producing/director of the Theatre Arts and Broadcasting Skills Center, a Chicago-based production company touring theatrical productions and creating and performing scripts for television and video. In the 1990s, Brown worked with Boarshead Theatre in Lansing, MI as a Teaching Artist working with middle and high schools. Brown worked as a lead team teacher in the Urban Writes program with American Place Theatre, producing theatrical scripts with middle and high school children. She spent four years working as a producer and promotion writer with NBC affiliate WOODTV8 and ABC41in Grand Rapids, MI. She also served as news associate producer and liaison for programming with NBC and ABC corporate, along with on-air talent coordinator and coordinator for audience development. In 2001, Brown became the Associate Producer for the National Black Touring Circuit, Inc. and she was on the professional development staff teaching playwriting and marketing with the renowned Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York. In 2004, she relocated to Bakersfield, CA, to serve as Director of the Spotlight Theater School for the Performing Arts, where she taught classes, designed curricula, generated grants and administrated the student component of the community theatre organization. In 2004, Brown was employed as a Teaching Artist with the Bakersfield Arts Council. There, she created performances with various schools, teaching theatre and drama. She also taught English to students grades 9-12 in the Kern School District. She relocated to Kalamazoo and

was engaged as a screen and stage writer. She also was a program developer, grant writer and fund and program developer for four organizations involving supplemental educational programs in theatre arts, drama and literature. She was Executive Director for New Horizons Learning Center and Fresh Fire Empowerment Center. She has recently been promoted to Executive Director of the Negro Ensemble Company, Inc. after having served as Program and Fund Developer. She has been an adjunct professor at Medgar Evers College, Robert Morris College in Chicago, Western Michigan University, Miami of Ohio, and Kalamazoo Community College, teaching TV production, journalism, English composition, literature, theatre, research writing and humanities. Brown holds a BA in journalism from Western Michigan University and a MA from Miami of Ohio, with dual majors in theatrical directing and theatre and arts management.

Levy Lee Simon (Playwright)

An award-winning writer, actor and director, Simon is originally from Harlem and a graduate of the University of Iowa Playwright's Workshop MFA. His award-winning plays include *For the Love of Freedom* the trilogy, produced by the Robey Theatre Company and Greenway Arts Alliance, LA (two NAACP Nominations for Best Playwright and an Ovation Nomination for Best Full-Length Play); *The Bow Wow Club* (Lorraine Hansberry/Kennedy Center Award for Best Full-Length Play and National Black Theatre Festival selection); *Same Train*, Algonquin Productions (OBR Award for Best Play and NBTF selection); *Smell the Power* (New Voices Playwriting Award for Best Play); and *The Guest at Central Park West*, The Workshop Theatre and the H.A.D.L.E.Y. Players (Audelco Award for Best Playwright and Dramatic Production of the Year.) Other productions include *The Stuttering Preacher*, *Caseload*, *God, the Crackhouse and the Devil*, *The Last Revolutionary* and *The Magnificent Dunbar Hotel* (The Robey Theatre Company, 29 straight sold-out performances.) He was commissioned to write *A Heated Discussion* by the Robey Theatre Company, which premiered in 2022 in Los Angeles to rave reviews. Simon is the recent recipient of the Playwright of the Year award by the San Diego Writers Festival 2022, honoring his body of work and his two productions in 2022. In 2020, he was invited into the Actor's Studio Playwrights/Directors Unit where he developed his latest play, *Fractured*, which received a workshop production in 2022 by the New Circle Theatre Company, NYC.

Cris Eli Blak (Playwright)

Blak's work has been performed off-Broadway, in London, Canada and Ireland. He's currently the recipient of the Emerging Playwrights Fellowship from The Scoundrel & Scamp Theatre and a selected participant of The Kennedy Center Playwrights Intensive. He strives to create work that reflects the world we live in.

Mona R. Washington (Playwright)

Washington is an award-winning playwright, librettist and activist. A 2021 New Jersey Artist Individual Fellowship recipient, her plays have been performed in Italy and France, as well as the United States.

Lisa McCree (Playwright)

McCree's work has been produced and/or developed by Harlem Theater Co., New Perspectives, Silver Trane, Theater Outlet (Allentown, PA), Access Theater (NY), The Genesis Guild, Saint Mark's Theater, The Henry Street Settlement (Women of Color Festival), The Atlantic Theater, Neighborhood Playhouse (NY), CUNY College Radio (NY) and WBAI 9905FM (NY). Commissioned works include theatrical pieces for The Medicine Show, Sea Island Nightmare, The Miserable Matter of Slavery, Russel Simmons and Def Comedy Jam (comics Rob Stapleton and Tha Stuff). Commissioned full-feature screenplays include *The Spirited Actor*, *Asylum Down* and acting challenge scripts. Published works include *And My Name Ain't Peaches*. Readings of McCree's plays were performed at Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (NY), Billie Holiday Theater (Brooklyn, NY), Brooklyn N. Slims, New Perspectives, NYU Ten Minute Play Festival, The Heritage Heights Village Project Co., Youth Empower Movement and the Frederick Douglass Creative Arts Center. Through the playwright's production company, The Writer's Clique, she has self-produced more than a dozen of her works in restaurants, lounges and black box theatre spaces throughout Harlem. Awards and top honors include a Humanitarian Award (Allentown, PA), New York University's 1-2 Idea into Action Playwriting Competition, Frank Silveras' Writers' Workshop and the National Black Theater Festival (Winston-Salem, NC). McCree is a member of NAACP and a past president and active member of Phi Theta Kappa. McCree is a graduate of Housatonic Community College and was also an artist-in-residence at the Genesis Guild.