



**BLACK
ENSEMBLE
THEATER**

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For Immediate Release

**CRITICS AND AUDIENCE MEMBERS
SHOW LOVE AND “RESPECT” FOR
MEMPHIS SOUL (THE STORY OF STAX RECORDS)!**

BLACK ENSEMBLE THEATER EXTENDS HIT MUSICAL INDEFINITELY!

CHICAGO – Since opening March 25, critics and audience members alike have been raving about the Black Ensemble Theater’s World Premiere musical, *Memphis Soul (The Story of Stax Records)*, written by David Barr III and produced and directed by Black Ensemble Theater Founder and Artistic Director Jackie Taylor. Among the accolades bestowed are **“Even by the exuberant standards of this joyous theater, *Memphis Soul* is an uncommonly good time”** (Chris Jones, *Chicago Tribune*), **“a surefire mega hit”** (Hedy Weiss, *Chicago Sun Times*) and **“a sizzling, intoxicating musical event”** (Betty Mohr, *Daily Southtown*).

To accommodate the demand for tickets, *Memphis Soul* has been extended indefinitely at the Black Ensemble Theater, 4520 N. Beacon Street. Performances take place Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m.

Just in time for the 50th Anniversary of the legendary soul label Stax Records this year, *Memphis Soul* pays tribute to the great music of the Stax era featuring the label’s biggest hits, such as “Respect Yourself” (the Staple Singers), “Hold On I’m Coming” (by Sam and Dave), “Gee Wiz” (Carla Thomas), “It’s Cheaper to Keep Her” (Johnnie Taylor), “Shaft” (Isaac Hayes), and “Soul Finger” (The Bar-Kays), just to name a few. This exciting, energetic, dance filled production will also pay tribute to the music of the legendary Otis Redding.

Stax Records holds a critical place in American music history as one of the most popular soul music record labels of all time — second only to Motown in sales and influence, but first in gritty, raw, Southern-steeped soul music. Stax placed more than 167 hit songs in *Billboard*’s Hot 100 pop charts as well as a staggering 243 hits on the R&B charts. Concord Music Group, which acquired the legendary Memphis label as part of its purchase of Fantasy Records in 2004, will honor Stax’s 50th year with the March 13 release of a deluxe edition 50-song, 2-CD box set titled *Stax 50: A 50th Anniversary Celebration*. In addition, Concord has reactivated Stax this year as a dynamic new force in contemporary R&B music committed to the power and legacy of their forbearers. The first new Stax signings are Isaac Hayes and Angie Stone.

(over)

Barr's storyline takes us back to 1980 and a fictitious 20th Anniversary Stax Concert. The fictional Pop's Place, a restaurant across the street from the legendary Stax Records, serves as the backdrop to deliver more of the Stax soulful sounds. Cast members include Rick Stone and Nikkieli Demone as the narrators, and Cynthia Carter and Aeisha McIntosh as members of the Pop's Place family. Other vocalists giving Stax Record their special treatment include Toi Overton, Megellan Watts, Dwayne Lonzo, Lawrence Thompson and Levi Stewart, while the Stax Dance Revue consists of Carrie, Cory Cantrell, Jon Pierce, Amber Whitted, and Cory Wright.

David Barr III is a member of BETC's Black Playwright's Initiative program and a Resident Playwright at Chicago Dramatists. Barr, who has been a playwright since his first full length work, *The Death of the Black Jesus*, was produced in 1986, is the proud recipient of several Illinois Arts Council Fellowships and numerous national playwriting awards. In 2005 he was the recipient of a Joseph Jefferson Citation in the Best New Work category for his play *The Upper Room* produced at Pegasus Players. Barr's works have been seen around the country. His last work for BETC was *The House that Rocked!*, based on the musical legacies of Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard.

The musical team deftly recreating the soulful Stax sound is led by music veteran Jimmy Tillman (drums), with Derrick Bounds, (piano), Herb Walker (guitar), Anderson Edwards (bass), and a horn section of Willie Henderson (baritone saxophone), Hank Ford (tenor saxophone) Bill Farley (trombone) and Paul Howard (trumpet). Musical Arranger is Thomas Washington.

The design team includes Carl Ulaszek (scenic design), Denise Karzewski (lighting design), Evelyn Danner and Glender Howard (costume design), and Ron White (sound design). Technical director and stage manager is Razor Griffith.

Tickets, priced at \$40 are now on sale by calling the Black Ensemble Theater Box Office at 773-769-4451 or Ticketmaster at 312-902-1500, or visiting www.ticketmaster.com. Discounts are available for students, seniors and groups.

The Black Ensemble Theater Company was founded in 1976 by Jackie Taylor, who has written and directed more than 100 productions for the company. In addition to its mainstage productions, the Black Ensemble Theater Company produces 'Plays with a Purpose,' a series of original youth-oriented musicals, designed to teach students positive life lessons and values, as well as several community-based programs that use theater arts to enrich the lives of countless students and families. The mission of the Black Ensemble Theater Company is threefold: to utilize theater to help eradicate racism; to perpetuate the history of the African American people; and to use theater to serve disenfranchised communities.

The Black Ensemble Theater Company, now celebrating its 30th Anniversary season, recently launched a \$20 million capital campaign for the construction and initial operations of a new state-of-the-art, 50,000-square-foot Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center. The new facility will be located at 4440 N. Clark Street, blocks away from the current Black Ensemble home, and is expected to commence construction in 2008. For more information on the Black Ensemble Theater Company or any of its productions, please visit www.BlackEnsembleTheater.org or call 773-769-4451.

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