



**BLACK  
ENSEMBLE  
THEATER**

For Immediate Release

## **BLACK ENSEMBLE THEATER TO BREAK GROUND ON NEW \$16 MILLION PERFORMANCE ARTS AND CULTURAL FACILITY**

*The 50,000 Square-Foot Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center,  
Expected to Open in September 2011, Will Be First Permanent Home in 34-Year History*

**CHICAGO** (August 26, 2010) — The Black Ensemble Theater will mark the groundbreaking of its new \$16 million performance arts and cultural facility, the Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center, at 4440 N. Clark Street, **Sept. 10, at 2 p.m.** The ceremony, which is open to the public, will feature performances from popular Black Ensemble productions and include remarks from founder and executive director **Jackie Taylor**. Invited guests include: **Governor Pat Quinn, Mayor Richard M. Daley, and Alderman Eugene Schulner**. Actor **Harry Lennix** will chair the ceremony.

“This is an exciting time in our history, as a new building will help to facilitate the resurgence of the theater as an authentic space where a great people can exist and thrive with autonomy while tearing down barriers and building bridges through storytelling,” Taylor said. “Our Board of Directors and capital campaign committee have been diligent in raising more than 80 percent of the funds needed to build the Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center and we look forward to working with our patrons, community leaders and supporters to secure the \$3 million needed to complete this important project.”

Chicago native Taylor founded the Black Ensemble Theater in 1976 with a mission to eradicate racism, merging her roles as actress and educator to build awareness and foster greater understanding of the African-American contribution to the cultural fabric of American history through theater. This charge is realized through outstanding, award-winning productions that attract highly diverse racial audiences as well as effective educational outreach programming that reaches more than 10,000 youth each year.

“For years, the Black Ensemble Theatre has provided artistic programming and educational outreach to help better the lives of African American Youth,” **Governor Pat Quinn** said. “The new Center will provide yet another source of activities – such as critical afterschool programs – to motivate children and teens in a positive direction.”

For the past 24 years, the Black Ensemble Theater has been headquartered in Chicago’s diverse Uptown community at the Uptown Center Hull House on North Beacon Street. As the theater thrived, receiving increased national acclaim and a growing fan base worldwide, a need for a stand-alone, singularly affiliated space emerged. At its new location, the Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center will be positioned to accommodate larger-scale productions, bigger audiences and a wider range of programming, and it is expected to increase the economic growth of the community, attracting more businesses, patrons and institutions to the area.

“I would like to congratulate Jackie Taylor and the Black Ensemble Theater on the ground breaking of their new facilities. For more than 30 years, the Black Ensemble Theater group has been a major contributor to Chicago's theater community and is known nationwide for their stage productions that highlight African American culture. This new expanded facility will allow the group to reach even further artistic heights while maintaining its place as a vehicle for all patrons of the arts to appreciate, understand and enjoy the African American experience,” said **Mayor Richard M. Daley**.

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“We are honored that the Black Ensemble Theater chose our community to create their permanent home and I know that they are going to see continued support from the residents of the 47<sup>th</sup> Ward,” said **Alderman Eugene Schulter**. “I believe that the Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center is going to provide a strong foundation for the ongoing economic development of the Ravenswood neighborhood, helping to make Clark Street a viable option for new businesses. In addition, as we’ve seen with the other cultural centers, the construction of this facility and the programs to be offered are going to create more jobs for Chicago residents.”

With its expanded and enhanced capabilities, the Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center is designed to engage the community and encourage more holistic, positive critical thought about how African-Americans are seen and presented. The new facility will include amenities such as:

- 300-seat main stage theater (double the capacity of the current venue)
- 150-seat stage to serve niche audiences and smaller-scale productions
- Classroom space that can be used by the community
- Rehearsal hall and dance studio that will feature scene, costume and wardrobe rooms
- Seven (7) dressing rooms
- Work space for musicians
- Expanded front lobby space with two concession areas
- Indoor parking garage

Morris Architects Planners, a renowned architecture firm in the theater community, designed the Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center. John Morris, AIA has led or been a part of design teams for high-caliber performance art buildings such as the Steppenwolf Theatre Company; Raven Theatre; Old Town School of Folk Music; Northlight Theatre; Lookingglass Theatre Company; and Beverly Arts Center. A mix of new and existing construction, the Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center will tout many cost- and energy-saving features through the incorporation of recycled products, regional materials, renewable resources, water-conserving plumbing technologies and a green roof featuring indigenous plants (LEED certification will be pursued and is expected to be achieved.) Furthermore, the Center is located near public transportation to promote efficient travel and promote access for all.

Said John Morris, “The new Center will provide an intimate, club-like venue with the acoustical ‘chops’ to handle the high-energy, R&B production numbers that accompany Black Ensemble’s captivating work. The studio-caliber acoustics, perfect sightlines and full production facilities will set them apart from other venues.”

The Black Ensemble Theater has been described as a local cornerstone, a national treasure and an international success. The Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center will mark a significant moment in the Black Ensemble Theater’s history as well as that of American Theater. Taking its place alongside such institutions as the historic Apollo Theater in New York, Freedom Theatre in Philadelphia, Karamu House in Cleveland and The Ensemble Theater in Houston, the Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center will be the first new dedicated African American Theater to open in decades. For more information on the Black Ensemble Theater or the new Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center, please visit [www.blackensembletheater.org](http://www.blackensembletheater.org) or call Jackie Taylor at 773-769-1540.

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