



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Rebecca Sheahan

Tel: 718-230-2528

Fax: 718-636-4166

rsheahan@651arts.org

651 ARTS launches a new performance series

LIVE & OUTSPOKEN

Featuring

**Lynn Nottage, Hugh Masekela,
Sonia Sanchez, Ronald K. Brown, Ralph Lemon,
Jimmy "Duck" Holmes,
April Yvette Thompson & Somi**

(Brooklyn, New York, April 5, 2010) The Brooklyn-based, **651 ARTS** – a performing arts organization dedicated to supporting and celebrating the multi-faceted work of contemporary performing artists of the African Diaspora – announces a new live performance/interview series featuring artist-to-artist interviews with innovators in contemporary dance, theater, music and literature.

Beginning on Tuesday, April 27 and running every Tuesday through May 18, 651 ARTS launches, **LIVE & OUTSPOKEN** – a 4-week series that celebrates the scope of work being made by artists of African descent today.

LIVE & OUTSPOKEN features literary, musical and performance powerhouses interviewing established and rising stars who are making their indelible marks in the performing arts world today, including: choreographer **Ronald K. Brown**; Bentonia, Mississippi bluesman **Jimmy "Duck" Holmes**; choreographer **Ralph Lemon**; South African musician/composer **Hugh Masekela**; Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright **Lynn Nottage** (*Ruined*);

poet/playwright/activist **Sonia Sanchez** (*Homegirls and Handgrenades*); multi-talented musician/performer **Somi**; and actress/writer **April Yvette Thompson** (*Liberty City*).

Each evening provides a vastly different interview experience for artist and audience through juxtaposition of place, voice, perspective and style – all evenings will offer insights into the methods, lives, artistry and social concerns of some of the worlds’ most engaging artists. 651 ARTS Executive Director, Georgiana Pickett explains, “We are excited to have this opportunity to bring together such talented artists to converse across disciplines, generations and experiences. Each artist will bring his or her unique personality and artistry to the table for dynamic conversations and performance that won’t happen anywhere else.”

In addition to the conversation - and in keeping with 651 ARTS dedication to live performance - the subject of the interview will demonstrate his/her artistic form throughout the evening and, if possible, the participants will collaborate artistically during the 90-minute event.

The interviews will be staged in specially curated venues in Brooklyn and Manhattan – including The Mark Morris Dance Center, BRICstudio, The Kumble Theater for the Performing Arts and the West Village home of Emmy Award-winning writer/producer Tom Fontana.

LIVE & OUTSPOKEN

2010

Award-winning choreographer RALPH LEMON interviews Mississippi bluesman JIMMY "DUCK" HOLMES

Tuesday, April 27, 2010

At the West Village home of Tom Fontana

7:00pm | \$35

For tickets call, 718-636- 4181 x2229

Seating is extremely limited. Advance purchase required.

Address information will be provided upon ticket purchase.

Mississippi bluesman, Jimmy "Duck" Holmes, plays a distinct *straight from the Delta* Bentonia Blues that has gained him recognition across the world. This is a rare opportunity to hear Holmes's solo acoustic guitar and soulful vocals in an intimate salon setting. Choreographer Ralph Lemon, a long-time friend, speaks with Holmes about his life, art and ownership of the oldest known juke joint in Mississippi: The Blue Front.

Ralph Lemon is Artistic Director of **Cross Performance**, a company dedicated to the creation of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary performance and presentation. In 2005, Lemon concluded *The Geography Trilogy*, a decade-long international research and performance project that spanned three continents as it explored race, history and memory. The project featured three evening-length dance/theater performances: *Geography* (1997); *Tree* (2000); and *Come home Charley Patton* (2004); two Internet art projects; the publication of two books by Wesleyan University Press; and several gallery exhibitions. Lemon is the recipient of a 2009 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and a 2009 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship for Interdisciplinary Work. In 2006, he was one of 50 artists to receive the inaugural United States Artists Fellowship. He has also received a 2005 "Bessie" (NY Dance and Performance) Award in recognition of *The Geography Trilogy*.

Jimmy "Duck" Holmes has lived a life steeped in blues. Today he is the last living practitioner of the celebrated style of Bentonia blues made famous by Skip James and Jack Owens. In addition, Holmes operates what is arguably the oldest juke joint in Mississippi, The Blue Front. Born to sharecroppers Carey and Mary Holmes in the summer of 1947, Jimmy "Duck" Holmes has lived his entire life in and around the small Mississippi town of Bentonia, home to one of the most unusual and beloved strains of Delta blues. Various blues researchers including Alan Lomax recorded Holmes beginning in the '70s. Holmes has released three CDs on the St. Louis-based record label Broke & Hungry, his debut CD *Back to Bentonia* (2006), *Done Got Tired of Tryin'* (2007), and *Ain't It Lonesome* (2009).

**Poet/playwright/activist SONIA SANCHEZ interviews
Choreographer RON BROWN**

Tuesday, May 4, 2010
The James and Martha Duffy Performance Space
at the Mark Morris Dance Center, Brooklyn
7:00pm | \$20
SmartTix.com
or call 212-868-4444

Award winning- choreographer, dancer and community leader Ronald K. Brown will open the evening with a rarely seen solo performance. Legendary poet and activist Sonia Sanchez talks with Brown about the 25th anniversary of his dance company, *Evidence*, the inspiration for his work, and their shared commitment to social change.

Award-winning American poet, **Sonia Sanchez** is one of the chief definers of the mid-twentieth century *Black Arts Movement*. Along with other poets, she formed a writer's workshop in Greenwich Village, which included legendary figures Amiri Baraka and Askia Muhammad Touré. Sanchez's accomplishments are many: while teaching at San Francisco State College (now University), she played an integral role in developing some of the first black studies courses in the nation, including a class in Black English. Her work as an academic has continued over the years and she has taught at universities throughout the country; by 2003, she had lectured at over 500 universities and colleges in the United States. A prolific writer of plays, books and poetry, her published works include: *Homecoming Poems*; *We a BaddDDD People*; *Liberation Poems*; *It's a New Day: Poems for Young Brothas and Sistuhs*; *A Blues Book for Blue Black Magical Women*; *I've Been a Woman: New and Selected Poems* (1981); and Sanchez's acclaimed, *Homegirls and Handgrenades* (1984) which received the American Book Award. Among her many honors, include the PEN Writing Award; the American Academy of Art and Letters' \$1,000 Award to Continue Writing; National Education Association Award; the American Book Award; and a Pew Fellowship in the Arts.

Choreographer **Ronald K. Brown** is the founder and Artistic Director of the **Evidence, A Dance Company** in Brooklyn, New York, now celebrating its 25th anniversary. Brown uses movement as a way to reinforce the importance of community in African American culture and to acquaint audiences with the beauty of traditional African forms and rhythms. He is an advocate for the growth of the African American dance community and is instrumental in encouraging young dancers to choreograph and to develop careers in dance. Brown's choreography is in high demand. He has created works for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, Ailey II, Cleo Parker Robinson Ensemble, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Jennifer Muller/The Works, Jeune Ballet d'Afrique Noire, Ko-Thi Dance Company, Philadanco and others. He choreographed Regina Taylor's award-winning play *Crowns*, and won an AUDELCO Award for his work on that production.

**South African composer HUGH MASEKELA interviews
Musician/performer SOMI**

Tuesday, May 11, 2010
Kumble Theater for the Performing Arts,
at Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus
7:00pm | \$25
For tickets call: 718-488-1624
www.kumbletheater.org

Ugandan, Rwandan and jazz vocalist and composer Somi performs songs from her 2009 chart-topping album *If The Rains Come First*. Music giant Hugh Masekela speaks with Somi about their shared influences and the connections between jazz and Africa. As a special treat, Masekela will sit in with Somi as she performs her new work.

Hugh Masekela is a celebrated trumpeter, flugelhornist, cornetist, composer, and singer from South Africa. He has played primarily in jazz ensembles, with guest appearances on albums by The Byrds, and Paul Simon. His song, "Soweto Blues," sung by his former wife, Miriam Makeba, is a blues/jazz piece that mourns the carnage of the Soweto riots in 1976. In 1987, he had a hit single with "Bring Him Back Home" which became an anthem for the movement to free Nelson Mandela. In the 1980s, he toured with Paul Simon in support of Simon's album *Graceland*. In 2003, Masekela was featured in the documentary film *Amandla!*, and in 2004, he released his autobiography, *Still Grazing: The Musical Journey of Hugh Masekela*, co-authored with journalist D. Michael Cheers. His most recent recordings include *Live at the Market Theatre* (2007) and *Phola* (2009).

A true multicultural woman, **Somi** was born in Illinois to immigrants from Rwanda and Uganda, then spent her early childhood in Zambia. Encouraged by her mother's love of song, Somi began singing herself, performing in church and eventually landing roles in her university's musical theater productions. The African cultural legacy, always crucial to her sound, is as vital as ever in her current music, which Somi likes to call *New African Soul*, as well as the music she heard upon relocating to New York — American jazz singers like Nina Simone, and Sarah Vaughan are as essential to her artistic development as the legendary African female voices of Miriam Makeba, Cesaria Evora and Sade. In January 2010, Somi's critically-acclaimed latest album, *If the Rains Come First*, was rated number two on World Billboard charts.

**Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright LYNN NOTTAGE interviews
actress/writer APRIL YVETTE THOMPSON**

Tuesday, May 18, 2010
BRICstudio, Brooklyn
7:00pm | \$20
SmartTix.com
or call 212-868-4444

Actress/writer April Yvette Thompson performs monologues from her riveting plays – *Liberty City* and *Good Bread Alley* - about the places where politics and history collide as seen in the personal stories of people of color. Pulitzer Prize-winner Lynn Nottage and Thompson discuss many of the shared themes in their work, as well as their paths to becoming successful playwrights.

Lynn Nottage is a playwright from Brooklyn. Her plays include *Intimate Apparel*; *Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine*; *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*; *Las Meninas*; and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Ruined* (2009). Her work has been produced and developed at theatres both nationally and internationally, including The Goodman Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Roundabout Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons, among many others. She is the recipient of numerous awards including the 2007 MacArthur Genius Award, an OBIE Award for playwriting, NY Drama Critics Circle Award, Best Play and John Gassner Outer Critics Circle awards, American Theatre Critics/Steinberg 2004 New Play Award, 2004 Francesca Primus Award, and 2 AUDELCO awards. She was awarded a 2007 Lucille Lortel Foundation Fellowship, 2005 Guggenheim Fellowship, The National Black Theatre Festival's August Wilson Playwriting Award and the 2004 PEN/Laura Pels Award for Drama. She is a graduate of Brown University and the Yale School of Drama, where she is currently a visiting lecturer. Lynn is also a recent graduate of New Dramatists.

New York-based writer/actress **April Yvette Thompson** has been widely recognized as a multi-talented writer and performer. *Liberty City*, which Thompson co-wrote with Jessica Blank, was nominated for a Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Solo Show, and earned Thompson Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, Broadway.com Audience and AUDELCO nominations for Best Solo Performance. Thompson has appeared in many off-Broadway productions, including the New York premiere of *The Exonerated* and the world premiere of Tanya Barfield & Lynn Nottage's *The Antigone Project* at The Women's Project. A Classical Theatre of Harlem company member, Thompson has received AUDELCO nominations for her work in *Medea* (dir. Alfred Preisser), and *Macbeth* and has appeared in productions of *King Lear* with Paul Butler and Jean Genet's *The Blacks* (dir. Christopher McElroen).



For over 20 years, 651 ARTS has been committed to developing, producing and presenting performance and cultural programming from the African Diaspora, with a primary focus on contemporary performing arts. 651 ARTS serves the cultural life of New York City, with a particular focus on Brooklyn, one of America's most culturally diverse communities.

651 ARTS' 2010 Season is sponsored in part by the following: **The Brooklyn Community Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, Con Edison, The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Fan Fox and Leslie R Samuels Foundation, The Ford Foundation, Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan Chase, Councilwoman Letitia James, The Lambent Foundation, Mertz Gilmore Foundation, Honorable Velmanette Montgomery, The National Endowment for the Arts, National Performance Network, The New York State Department of Cultural Affairs, The New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency, and The New England Foundation for the Arts**

**Press information:
Rebecca Sheahan
Tel: 718-230-2528
Email: rsheahan@651arts.org**