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(Credit: Luxigon)

HISTORIC NATIONAL BLACK THEATRE TO BREAK GROUND ON MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT IN HARLEM

Born out of Dr. Barbara Ann Teer's 1968 vision to provide space for Black Creatives

Project will deliver a state-of-the-art, permanent home for the city's longest-running Black theater, and 222 mixed-income apartments

NEW YORK (June 24, 2022) – National Black Theatre (NBT) announced today it has begun construction on the long-awaited, state-of-the-art, permanent home for the venerable Harlem institution at the intersection of 125th Street and Fifth Avenue. The 21-story project is being developed in partnership with LMXD and RAY. In addition to NBT's multi-floor space, the plans will include 222 units of mixed-income apartments and substantial commercial space along 125th Street, as well as a multi-purpose communal living room open to the community. This project will ensure that the longest-running Black theater in New York City continues to serve as a vital resource for artists and entrepreneurs, and for the production of work that is rooted in the imagination of contemporary Black voices, challenging the mainstream.

Sade Lythcott, CEO of National Black Theatre, praised her mother's wisdom. "It takes vision and a visionary like my mother, Dr. Barbara Ann Teer, to see into the future and what might be possible today. Buying this city block in the '80s ensured that National Black Theatre and Black artists from around the world could experience what home truly feels like. She understood the catalytic impact of marrying arts & culture with ownership to ensure a permanent presence within the ever-changing landscape of our community."

Designed by Frida Escobedo Architects and Handel Architects, the new project is especially notable for being the first to utilize the City's Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) bonus, specifically designed by former New York City Council member Inez E. Dickens. First of its kind, this VPA empowers the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) and the Department of City Planning to work with a local arts advisory council as part of a 2008

comprehensive rezoning, to spur revitalization and sustain the cultural growth of Harlem-based organizations in concert with mixed-income development along the historic 125th Street corridor.

“Dr. Teer fervently believed that NBT can serve as a model of Black Liberation in service of human transformation,” says NBT’s Board Chair Michael Lythcott. “Today we are not just breaking ground on a building, but on a dream that artists can live, work and serve within their own community; a promise and commitment to our community for more than a half century that Harlem will remain the cultural capital of the Black world.”

Founded in 1968 by Dr. Teer, an award-winning performer, director, entrepreneur, and a champion of the Black Arts Movement, NBT broke boundaries from Day One, becoming the first revenue-generating Black arts complex in the country; later included as a part of the permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the recipient of a special Obie Award.

“National Black Theatre is an oasis; a place where the Black experience is re-woven, re-told, and re-imagined as a source of our redemption and collective healing,” says NBT Board Member, Van Jones. “I speak for the entire board when I say, we could not be more excited to see the advancement of Dr. Barbara Ann Teer’s vision commence, on this momentous occasion of breaking ground on the theater of the future. It will ensure Black Artists and makers continue to have a home rooted in our salvation and liberation. A place where Black stories and storytellers can continue to seed change.”

Throughout the decades that followed, the theater has become an important cultural anchor, showcasing authentic, intersectional stories about the Black experience, written, and told by transformative voices that have helped to shift the inaccuracy around African Americans' cultural identity. Under the leadership of CEO Sade Lythcott and Jonathan McCrory, Executive Artistic Director, the integrity of NBT’s mission has been maintained, helping reshape a more inclusive American theater field by providing an artistically rigorous and culturally sensitive space for artists of color to experiment, develop and present new work.

In the interim during construction, NBT’s Beyond Walls initiative will continue to uplift Black narratives in myriad ways: outdoors, online, and in partnership with peers such as Apollo Theater, New York Philharmonic, New York Theatre Workshop and The Public Theater - The latter two of which are currently running performances of Dreaming Zenzile and the Pulitzer Prize-winning Fat Ham, respectively.

“This moment is a moment of reclamation as the ground breaks on our historic site, a new home that NBT will claim. NBT is similarly breaking new ground creatively as we share locally, nationally, and internationally the principles and theory of change that made and make National Black Theatre so special and unique,” declares Jonathan McCrory.

“The National Black Theatre is born from and for revolution — revolution in culture, theatre, and the arts. This space has been and will continue to be the home of intentional innovation, radical imagination, and a deep and tender care for the community it reflects, is inspired by, and serves,” says Board Member Cleo Wade, Capital Campaign co-chair. “Today we break new ground for groundbreaking ideas that will provide an everlasting gift for generations to come.”

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About National Black Theatre

National Black Theatre (NBT), the nation’s first revenue-generating Black arts complex, was founded in 1968 by the late visionary artist Dr. Barbara Ann Teer. NBT is the longest-running Black theatre in New York City, one of the oldest theaters founded and consistently operated by a woman of color in the nation and most recently included in the permanent collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. NBT’s core mission is to produce transformational theater that helps to shift the inaccuracy around African Americans’ cultural identity by telling authentic stories of Black lifestyle. As an alternative learning environment, NBT uses theater arts as a means to educate, enrich, entertain, empower and inform the national conscience around current social issues impacting our communities. Under the leadership of Sade Lythcott, CEO and Jonathan McCrory, Executive Artistic Director, NBT’s three core programs—the Theater Arts Program, Communications Arts Program and Entrepreneurial Arts Program—help reshape a more inclusive American theater field by providing an artistically rigorous and culturally sensitive space for artists of color to experiment, develop and present new work. Working with trailblazing artists from Nona Hendrix to Jeremy O. Harris, and helping to launch the careers, most recently, of artists such as Dominique Morisseau, Radha Blank, Mfoniso Udofia, Saheem Ali, Lee Edward Colston II, and Ebony Noelle Golden, and incubating Obie Award-winning companies like The Movement Theatre Company and Harlem9’s 48Hours in Harlem, NBT’s cultural production remains unparalleled. Located in the heart of Harlem, NBT has produced 300+ original works; won 56 Audelco Awards; received a CEBA Award of Merit; and has been nominated for multiple Drama Desk awards. NBT is supported by grants from the Ford Foundation, New York Community Trust, Shubert Foundation, Howard Gilman Foundation, Jerome Foundation, Andrew Mellon Foundation, City Council of New York, City of New York Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Columbia Service Society, and private donations. Visit www.nationalblacktheatre.org or follow NBT on Facebook (@NationalBlackTheatre) and Twitter/Instagram (@NatBlackTheatre).