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FRANKLIN PARK COALITION ANNOUNCES
2009 ELMA LEWIS PLAYHOUSE IN THE PARK
FREE SUMMER PERFORMING ARTS SERIES

Tuesdays, July 14 – August 18, 2009

(BOSTON – June 11, 2009) The Franklin Park Coalition (FPC) partners with the National Center of Afro-American Artists (NCAAA) and the Boston Parks and Recreation Department's ParkARTS Program to present a free performing arts series named for the founder and director of the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts. Lewis, a beloved Boston icon, established Playhouse in the Park in 1966, and presented artists like Duke Ellington, Olatunji, Odetta, Billy Taylor, and the Boston Ballet. In its original inception, it ran through 1978.

Four years ago, the FPC, NCAAA, and ParkARTS began their effort to re-establish Playhouse in the Park as an exciting multicultural summer performance venue. This year, they present 12 Tuesday shows. The 11 a.m. morning shows run about one hour, and are geared toward children, families and summer camps. Evening shows, hosted by Naheem, run from 6 to 8:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. These FREE, outdoor performances take place at Valley Gates, next to The Playstead, the big field in Franklin Park between White Stadium and the rear entrance of the Zoo, not far from where the original Playhouse stood. Rain locations for some shows TBA. For more information, call (617) 442-4141 or visit www.franklinparkcoalition.org.

July 14, 11 am – Seekers of Knowledge

High energy hip hop dance by girls age 6—18 from Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan and the South End. The Seekers after school and summer programs have served over 450 area girls since being founded in 1995.

July 14, 6 p.m. – Jazz with Kendrick Oliver and the New Life Jazz Ensemble plus Vivian Cooley-Collier & Company

Opening night for Playhouse 2009 will be a festive event with the gospel jazz of Boston-based Kendrick Oliver and his New Life Jazz Ensemble. Think of Sister Rosetta Tharpe singing with The Count Basie Band and you begin to get an idea of Oliver's vision. "We took old spirituals like "Wade in the Water" and "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho," he says. "We would put a Basie twinge on it. We are constantly working on it in rehearsal, learning how to interpret Basie's music and adding it to the New Life spirit."

Vivian Cooley-Collier is a gifted mezzo-soprano who has been a fixture on the local jazz scene for many years. Vivian has been instrumental in the production of the NCAAA's annual production of "Black Nativity," since its inception in 1970.

At the beginning of this show, there will be an opening ceremony, honoring Miss Lewis's legacy, led by the NCAAA.

July 21, 11 a.m. - Stephen O'Neal and IntaAfrika, plus Marcus Santos and Batukaxe

IntaAfrika, features Stephen O'Neal who has been part of the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts' annual performance of Langston Hughes' "Black Nativity" since the beginning in 1970. O'Neal and drummer Salim Abdul-Rahman were students of the world renowned M. Babatunde Olatunji. O'Neal is the co-founder of IntaAfrika which has a 15 year history in the community. Joined by his 13 year old son, Stephen Korliss, the group has traveled extensively, with stops in Senegal and Gambia.

Afro-Brazilian ensemble Batukaxé presents a modern style of the authentic tradition of Blocos Afro and Axe music. Marcus Santos and Sandro Scoccia created Batukaxé as part of AfroBrazil.org,, an organization whose goal is to preserve, promote, and strengthen the Afro-Brazilian culture in the U.S. Developed in the state of Bahia, this music is rooted in the tradition of the Carnival Blocos Afro, groups of vocalists and percussionists performing Brazilian rhythms based on African roots.

July 21, 6 p.m. – Serious Bizness featuring Ray Greene

Serious Bizness is a Boston-based band of industry professionals who jam to create a little bit of funk and a whole lotta rhythm and blues. Led by Webster Roach (bass), the group consists of Wayne Jones (guitar), Ryan Brown (keyboards), Curtis Warren (saxophone), Anthony Steele (drums) with Ray Greene on vocals and trombone plus Athene Wilson on vocals. Members of the group have toured nationally and recorded with artists such as: Walter Beasley, Najee, John Legend, Chuck Loeb, Bob Moses, Andre Ward, Rick James, Lauren Hill and the Backstreet Boys.

July 28, 11 a.m. - A. Major Dance

This local dance company celebrates over 40 years of training young artists for the local and national dance stage. A. Major dancers have gone on to perform on stages with "Bring in the Noise, Bring in the Funk," Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Essence Music Awards, Broadway's "A Few Good Men" and Debbie Allen's musical "Soul Possessed." See tomorrow's great dancers today.

July 28, 11 a.m. – Tentumbao

Tentumbao is a seven-piece funky and soulful Afro-Latin-Caribbean band that mixes spicy rhythms with vocal harmonies, captivating melodies and a touch of jazz. The group plays authentic son and salsa classics as well as hot originals.

***** Playhouse shows on Aug. 4 are inside the Franklin Park Zoo, as part of National Night Out. Admission to the Zoo is free all day.***

August 4, 11 a.m. Origination

The dancers of Origination are dedicated to promoting the importance of self-respect, health, nutrition, education and self-esteem, while emphasizing the impact that African influences have had on dance. Under the direction of choreographer Shaumba Yandje Dibinga, they specialize in hip-hop, jazz, tap, step and Caribbean dance.

August 4, 6 p.m. Ashmont Hill

Dorchester-grown Ashmont Hill has had great success on the Billboard gospel charts, and they make their Playhouse debut. The quartet, all related by blood or marriage, perform original contemporary gospel/pop songs.

** National Night Out Boston 2009, "The Power of Neighbors," is the 25th annual citywide celebration. This program cultivates and strengthens partnerships between the community, youth, police, city agencies and community-based organizations. National Night Out also acknowledges the remarkable contributions of Neighborhood Crime Watch groups, and seeks to increase participation in these programs from local residents. For more information visit www.BostonCrimeWatch.com or call 617-343-4345.

August 11, 11 a.m. – Commonwealth Shakespeare Company

Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, known for performing free Shakespeare on Boston Common has created a show of scenes and songs by and inspired by Shakespeare, adapted especially for young audiences.

August 11, 6 p.m. - Andre Ward

Take a seasoned musician who can play the soprano, alto and tenor saxophone with skilled ease and passion and mix in varied elements of gospel, jazz, R & B and you have Boston's own Chicago-born, Berklee trained Andre Ward. An accomplished purveyor of smooth jazz, Ward has performed for delighted audiences all over the world. Ward was the musical director for Freddie Jackson and has toured with Teena Marie, Will Downing, The Bobby Jones Gospel Group, The Four Tops, The O'Jays and Dizzy Gillespie.

August 18, 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. - Boston Children's Festival

August 18, dusk – Movie Night

Bring the whole family to see *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa*

For more information about the Movie Night or Boston Children's Festival, call the Boston Parks & Recreation Department at (617) 635-4505.

Said Walter Little, of the Franklin Park Coalition Board of Directors, colleague and supporter of the late Elma Lewis, "Miss Lewis was a visionary leader who sought to inspire and train young people. The Playhouse gave students from the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts both a stage for public performance as well as exposure to professional musicians and entertainers. She sought to instill in young people of color the highest aspirations for success. The Playhouse revival this summer features young performers, offers shows targeting youth audiences, and as always, builds community around Franklin Park."

The Elma Lewis Playhouse in the Park is produced by First Night, in cooperation with the City of Boston, Mayor Thomas M. Menino; the Boston Parks and Recreation Department, Antonia Pollak, Commissioner; ParkARTS and the National Center for Afro-American Artists, with support from The Boston Foundation, Clipper Ship Foundation, an anonymous donor, and many local Franklin Park supporters. *El Planeta* is the official print media sponsor, and Touch FM is a radio sponsor. Boston Parks and Recreation Department's ParkARTS Program, of which this is a part, is sponsored by Bank of America.

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