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### **KARAMU HOUSE TO INDUCT EMILY LASTER AND CHRIS WEBB AT 2007 HALL OF FAME INDUCTION CEREMONY ON SEPTEMBER 8**

**CLEVELAND – June 28, 2007** – Karamu House will show its appreciation for Emily Laster and Chris Webb at its 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Hall of Fame induction ceremony on September 8.

Laster, 85, is nominated in the Administrative category. She dedicated 41 years to Karamu as registrar and senior program coordinator. She began her Karamu tenure as a volunteer in 1956. After three years of service, Karamu founders Russell and Rowena Jelliffe, asked Laster to join the staff as a box office attendant. She later served as a volunteer, registrar, receptionist, switchboard operator, special services coordinator and senior/volunteer coordinator.

She was instrumental in organizing the Karamu Volunteer Organization. She planned and oversaw the meetings of the Karamu Golden Age Club and helped establish the Most Experienced Adults (MEA) Dancers in 1990 under the direction of choreographer/dancer Louis Naylor. Laster is also credited with starting the New York and Los Angeles Karamu alumni organizations.

During a retirement celebration in Laster's honor in 1997, President Bill Clinton sent a letter thanking Laster for "her spirit and history of volunteerism." Cleveland Mayor Mike White, Karamu and state and local community leaders also honored Laster.

Webb, 18, a 2007 graduate of the Cleveland School of the Performing Arts, is the Rising Star nominee in this year's Hall of Fame class.

He is well known to Karamu audiences as an actor and performance poet. He first performed at Karamu in 2005 during Black History Month in the world premiere of "The Little Boy Who Shook Up the World: The Emmett Till Story." He has performed at the Cleveland School of the Arts, Playhouse Square, Severance Hall, the Allen Theatre, the International Children's Games and on the Adelphia cable station.

As a performance poet, Chris has delivered electrifying messages at local Martin Luther King Day celebrations, poetry slam concerts, local churches and for two years, represented Cleveland in the SLAM U! Poetry Team competitions in San Francisco and New York.. He has appeared in the Karamu production of "A Hip Hop Aesop" during the city's annual Ingenuity Festival of Arts & Technology. He later reprised his role in the four- week production of "Aesop" at Karamu House in 2006.

Webb has received a scholarship to the California Institute of The Arts in Valencia, California and will begin classes in the fall.

Karamu, the nation's oldest multicultural arts center and springboard to success for scores of African-Americans, will also honor other alumni at its second annual induction ceremony. This year's event will be held at the Marriott Cleveland East Hotel in Warrensville Heights. Last year's sold-out celebration kicked off the first hall of fame in Karamu's 90-year history.

Other nominees in the "Hollywood & Broadway Meet at the 'Mu" hall of fame ceremony include:

- **Bill Cobbs** (National Legend-Living), began his career in the 1960s as an amateur actor in the Karamu House Theater and starred in "Purlie Victorious." After leaving for New York in 1970, he amassed an impressive list of credits and appeared in such films as "The Body Guard," "New Jack City," and most recently with Ben Stiller in "Night at the Museum."
- **Mike Malone** (National Legend-Posthumous). an internationally known director, choreographer, producer, teacher and administrator, Karamu Performing Arts Director and Interim Artistic Director who first staged Langston Hughes' holiday favorite, "Black Nativity" at Karamu.
- **Reuben and Dorothy Silver** (Local Legend-Living). Reuben arrived at Karamu in 1955 and served as its artistic director Karamu also provided an artistic home for Dorothy, who served in every capacity from actor and assistant director to resident guest director.
- **Congressman Louis Stokes** (Benefactor). Retired congressman and longtime supporter who secured more than \$500,000 in public and private funding for the organization.
- **Hazel Mountain Walker** (Local Legend-Posthumous), a lawyer, teacher and elementary school principal, Karamu House trustee, committee chair and actress attributed with naming the institution Karamu.
- **Charles Sallee'** (Fine Arts), a painter and graphic artist who taught art at Karamu and Kennard Junior High School. His works are preserved in collections at Karamu, the National Museum of American Art in Washington, Howard University and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

Karamu House has been an important part of the African-American theater community for many years and has fostered legions of alumni who have achieved fame nationally and internationally. Although its alumni are spread across the country, from New York to Los Angeles, they are a tight-knit group who hold fond memories of Karamu as their proving ground.

The list of corporate sponsors for the event continues to grow and includes The Presenting Sponsor National City, Cleveland Clinic Health System, Medical Mutual of Ohio, KeyBank and The President's Council. Companies interested in sponsoring the event or purchasing a program ad may call Melanie McCottry at 216-496-6108.

Information on tickets to this year's dinner and induction ceremony is available by calling Vivian C. Wilson at 216-795.7070, ext. 215. All proceeds from this event will directly benefit Karamu House.

For additional information on Karamu, please visit our Web site at [www.karamu.com](http://www.karamu.com).

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