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News Release

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THE JEFF AWARDS TO HONOR 50 YEAR LEGACY OF BLACK ENSEMBLE THEATER WITH THIS SEASON'S SPECIAL EQUITY AWARD

***The only theater in the nation whose mission is to eradicate racism
receives recognition for its historic arts leadership and
creative achievements***

(September 9, 2026 - Chicago) – At each season's Equity Awards a unique spotlight is directed to organizations and individuals who have made a significant impact on Chicago theater. At the 2025-2026 Joseph Jefferson Awards for Equity Theater September 14th, Black Ensemble Theater will be recognized with a Special Equity Award to celebrate its legacy that was born from a powerful belief: that the arts can heal, unite, and transform. What began in 1976 as a place where Black voices could shine with truth, dignity, and joy, Black Ensemble Theater has grown into a nationally celebrated institution committed to eradicating racism and elevating the brilliance of shared humanity.

The 58th Anniversary Jeff Awards ceremony will begin at 7:00pm (CST) Monday, September 14th at the Harris Theater in Chicago, 205 East Randolph Street. The show will be preceded by red carpet interviews featuring award nominees and theater community members beginning at 5:30pm. Jackie Taylor, Founder and CEO, and Daryl D. Brooks, Artistic Director, will accept the award at the ceremony on behalf of Black Ensemble Theater.

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Founded 50 years ago by actress, producer and playwright Jackie Taylor, Black Ensemble Theater has grown from a small community-arts organization originally operating out of a small theater in Chicago's Old Town neighborhood to a vibrant, internationally renowned arts institution producing excellent theater and outstanding, award-winning educational outreach programs. The only theater in the nation with a mission to eradicate racism, the company uses theater to bring diverse races together in a community that embraces similarities and fosters dialogue, understanding, acceptance, and healing.



Over the last several decades, the theater gained renown and awards for original, uplifting musical biographies celebrating legendary African American artists, such as productions honoring Marvin Gaye, Teddy Pendergrass, Dionne Warwick and Jackie Wilson. The company has received multiple honors including 68 Jeff Award nominations, 14 awards and is nominated for seven categories this season.

To unify, protect, and amplify Chicago's African American playwrighting community, the theater established the Black Playwrights Initiative in 2005 as a specialized incubator to develop and source original scripts specifically for the company, acting as a "playwriting factory" that ensures a steady continuum of culturally relevant stories.

In 2011, the company celebrated the grand opening of the Black Ensemble Theater Cultural Center, the theater's first permanent home, in the heart of Chicago's Uptown community. The state of the art 50,000-square-foot facility features a 299-seat mainstage. This year, a 150-seat flexible studio theater space within the Black Ensemble Cultural Center opens in October and allows the theater to produce additional original plays, cabaret style performances and other events. The new theater will offer additional opportunities to support the Black Playwrights Initiative.

To expand the theater's cultural corridor and support local artists, the Free to BE Village was approved in 2025 by the City of Chicago. This five-story mixed use arts development will be located across the street from the theater, featuring affordable housing for artists, a Performing Arts Education Center, a Media and Technology Center, and retail space including a literary café, all relating to the mission to the organization.

As the company celebrates its 50th Anniversary milestone, the Mainstage will honor the legacy of Black Ensemble Theater by bringing back some of the most iconic, beloved productions in its history that affirm the richness of Black culture. With a mission to eradicate racism through the utilization of theater arts and community engagement that is even more vital today, the company is focused on the next fifty years of equity, diversity and coming together as one.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for the 58th Anniversary Jeff Awards for Equity Theater are \$100 for general admission and \$85 for union members (AEA/USA/SDC/IATSE/DGA/AFM/CFM/WGA). To purchase tickets and learn more about the ceremony and the Jeff Awards, visit www.jeffawards.org.

Information can also be found on our social media including [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

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About The Jeff Awards

The Jeff Awards is one of the most active and engaged theater awards organizations in the country evaluating hundreds of theatrical productions annually and holding two awards ceremonies highlighting work over the past Equity and Non-Equity seasons. Through our recommendations, awards, fellowship grants and honors we help foster the growth of companies, encourage artists, bring new appreciation for diverse storytelling, and cultivate civic pride in the achievements of the Chicago theater community. Originally chartered in 1968 to recognize Equity productions, the Jeff Awards Non-Equity Wing was established in 1973 to celebrate outstanding achievement in non-union theater. The Jeff Awards is professionally independent and voting members of the committee are unaffiliated with any theater companies or producing organizations.

For more information, visit www.jeffawards.org.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON NOMINATIONS AND THE AWARDS PROGRAM

The Jeff Awards website lists all the current nominees, previous recipients and Special Award honorees. Visit www.jeffawards.org for more information.

Names of this season's award recipients will be released immediately following the program on September 14th by email and on our website under Equity Awards at www.jeffawards.org.

Media may contact theaters and artists directly for interviews. For quotes or an interview with any Jeff Awards committee member, please call or e-mail Suzanne Ross at 312-953-6987 or media@jeffawards.org.

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