

Ujima Company at School 77

"I believe in everything this production represents... I can identify on sooo many levels with the storyline... Putting on a production like this is a GREAT TEAM EFFORT. Everyone working is NOT working for him/herself but for the people working with them... This is my favorite Ujima play to date and I can identify on sooo many levels with the storyline, plot and theme of the play. I have had my utilities turned off. I know what it's like to feel powerless as well as have the power to choose my destiny." - Patricia Elliott, actor in Free Fred Brown

More about our School 77 Capital Project

Ujima Company, Inc. is excited about our move into the former School 77 building. The theater build out is taking place between fall 2018 and winter 2020, with Ujima opening its first production in the space in May 2019, and our 41st season in the fall of 2019. We are raising funds for the buildout over the next nine months.

Our School 77 is an adaptive reuse of an historically significant former Buffalo Public School, built in 1927, into a mixed-use community center. The building includes 30 housing units for senior citizens and the headquarters of three organizations: Ujima Company, Peace Of The City, and PUSH Buffalo.

Through a planning process started in 2014, led by PUSH Buffalo, community members identified the vacant school building as an opportunity to create a mixed-use community hub on the West Side. With the support of Councilman David Rivera, the building was secured for development in service to the neighborhood and beyond. Through a phased survey of neighborhood residents, including the collection of 600 comment cards, the vision for the space was refined. This vision includes a performance space and resident theatre company. ***A number of local theatre companies were considered for this opportunity, and because of Ujima's commitment to creating a family with our neighbors around the Company, Ujima was selected to become the building's resident theatre company.***



The cast and crew of For Colored Girls... 2012

School 77 incorporates state of the art environmentally friendly systems in its renovation. Ujima's build expands this investment. LED stage lights have always meant great savings through energy efficiency and the long lifespan of the LED vs. incandescent lamps. Now, however, computerized color control allows LED lighting to better simulate the warmth and "lifelike" appearance of traditional theatre lighting. Besides its simulation of traditional lighting, using LED instruments eliminates the need for color media and the ladder climbing traditionally required. LED is the future of theatre lighting and it is essential that theatre companies like Ujima not wait to join the movement. We cannot wait to share are beautiful lighting system with you.

Once settled, Ujima will continue our work of exploring the many life experiences through plays written by and about African Americans. We embrace the opportunity for our programming to be influenced by the requests and needs of our new neighbors, and envision the expansion of intergenerational and international programming.

More about Ujima Company, Inc.

Ujima is a multiethnic, multicultural, and multigenerational professional theatre. A Swahili word, Ujima means “collective work and responsibility” and it is from this tenet that we derive our purpose. Ujima Company was founded in 1978 under the leadership of Lorna C. Hill, who is the Artistic Director to this day. Our ensemble is now the longest established acting company in Buffalo. In 1983 Ujima took residency at TheaterLoft on Elmwood Avenue and remained in that space until 2015. Ujima has consistently produced yearly seasons of 3-5 productions.

In June 2015 Ujima vacated TheaterLoft due to a partial roof collapse and subsequent water damage to the space. This could have been perceived as a tragic situation, yet we used this opportunity to transform our presentation of theatre, allowing us to reach new audiences and to form collaborations and new projects with various organizations. Our flexible approach has permitted us to make use of a number of venues for productions since 2015, including: Alleyway Theater, Paul Robeson Theater, Hallwalls, Canisius College, Buffalo Public Schools, and Kleinhans Music Hall. In 2016 we started rebuilding and growing with a variety of secured contracts and grants. This includes \$40,000 or \$50,000 per year for ten years from The Chorus Foundation. We are in our third year of this grant commitment.

We have produced plays based on the needs and requests of the community with themes including war, religion, women in gangs, and genocide. We utilize theatre as a tool to build understanding of our world; so of course, we also have fun sometimes, and present uplifting, honest themes featuring plenty of laughter, music, and dance.

We have also transformed our operations to align with our core values of collective work and responsibility. No longer operating under the traditional executive director and staff structure, we are moving toward a 3-person management team that will work together to accomplish the goals of the organization while working closely with the Board of Directors. We now have two full-time staff members: Maria Ta was promoted to Program Director in September after experience as our stage manager and a year on the staff managing programs. We will add a third staff position in the role of Development & Operations Director in 2020.



What can we expect with Ujima’s new home at School 77?

- A theatre resource that supports positive values necessary for the development of the beloved community
- A reboot of The Dunbar Project, our theatre training program for youth
- A new partnership with Inclusive Theatre, bringing them in residence to build a truly inclusive community
- A new membership program for our neighbors in the 14213, 14201, and 14202 zip codes, which will include their voice in the programming we provide, and benefits for participation
- Continued leadership with our partners in advocacy for a socially just community
- The presentation of works by new artists and performing arts groups
- Focus on theatre that reflects the lives of African Americans, people of color, and marginalized communities
- Employment opportunities for local artists

More about our company created productions

"Theatre and storytelling have the capacity to break down what may seem like complex issues by placing them back in the essence and context of their human elements."

- Matthew Crehan Higgins, Actor in *Free Fred Brown*.

We will continue the saga of Fred Brown during our 41st season, with the creation of ***Free Fred Brown: The Prequel***, the follow-up to our current production, ***Free Fred Brown!***. Written by its performers under the direction of Lorna C. Hill, ***Free Fred Brown!*** incorporates true stories, contemporary events, and historical facts to explain the disproportionate impact the environmental crisis has on communities segregated by racial and economic disparities. Fred is imprisoned for turning his gas on in below freezing conditions after a non-payment shut-off. The story provides numerous opportunities for entry into the lives of Fred's friends, family, and his community. The play allows even those who are most privileged to understand the tightrope that those living on the edges of poverty in Buffalo must walk.

The looming question, at the end of the play, is: How did these most vulnerable, aka "Frontline" communities, come to be? The answer requires an understanding of the history and legacy of slavery. ***Free Fred Brown: The Prequel*** will illuminate that history in a way that allows the audience to identify and understand the cumulative effects of centuries of institutionalized racism.

Theatre can help people to explore, investigate, and ultimately - begin to understand experiences and realities they otherwise may not be willing to accept. ***"The Prequel"*** is our next step in building collective responsibility and understanding in our community.

More about Lorna C. Hill, Founder and Artistic Director

Lorna C. Hill is a multi-talented performer and director. Her experience includes stage, feature film, television, commercials, industrial films and voice-overs. She is also widely known as a storyteller *par excellence*. Lorna is a poet and playwright. She has written seven plays. Her best known play, *Yalla Bitch* was performed as part of the first International Women Playwrights Conference in 1986. Lorna is a teacher and teaching artist. In 2014, she retired from the the Buffalo Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts. She has received innumerable awards and honors as an actor, director, writer, advocate, and educator. Lorna was greatly honored recently, when the Black Alumni of Dartmouth Association and the Office of the Dean of the College honored her, having been the first woman accepted to Dartmouth College. Lorna received her B.A. in American Intellectual History at Dartmouth. She received her M.A. in Theatre at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where she also was a Schomburg Fellow and a Ph.D. candidate in American Studies.



429 Plymouth Avenue. Suite #2, Buffalo, NY 14213
(716) 322-5178, admin@ujimacoinc.org, ujimacoinc.org/ujima77

Ujima Company School 77 Capital Campaign	
Expenses	
Hard costs	
Platform and Power Operated Chairs	\$130,000
Painting Theatre	\$16,400
Lighting and Sound System Design	\$7,500
Electrics & Grid installation	\$74,000
Sound System	\$3,500
Additional Sound, Lighting, Equipment & Fixtures	\$17,000
Lighting System	\$68,633
Construction: 2 Walls Behind Glass Balcony	\$5,000
Mezzanine and Tech Booth with Installation	\$27,980
Technical and Scene Shop Equipment	\$10,000
Permanent Theatre Furniture & Finishes	\$28,230
Build Out Provided by PUSH with Tax Credits	\$218,757
Soft costs	
Design, Legal, Moving, Staff, Consultant and Organization Operations	\$123,000
Total Expenses	\$730,000
Campaign Income Plan	
Secured Income	
PUSH Buffalo	\$318,757
Cullen Foundation	\$100,000
M&T Bank	\$100,000
Additional Foundation Grants	\$5,000
Additional Corporate Grants	\$22,500
Individual Gifts	\$15,000
Total Secured Income	\$561,257
Planned Income	
Government	\$70,000
Foundation and Corporate	\$75,000
Individual Gifts \$1,000-\$5,000	\$20,000
Individual Gifts up to \$999	\$3,743
Total Planned Income	\$168,743
Total Campaign Income	\$730,000