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Harlem's National Black Theater revives $185M project

Mixed-use, 21-story building to include 222 apartments

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2033 Fifth Avenue with National Black Theater CEO Sade Lythcott and Dasha Zhukova (Google Maps, Luxigon, Getty)

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By TRD Staff

National Black Theater has brought in Dasha Zhukova's real estate venture Ray on a years-long project to replace its Harlem home with a mixed-use development.

The Harlem cultural institution — which told Black Americans' stories that rarely appeared on mainstream stages — has for several years been planning a development for the site at 2033 Fifth Avenue at the corner of 125th Street.

The now $185 million plan calls for a 21-story building that includes 222 residential units, retail space and a theater spanning from the third to fifth floors, the New York Times reported. Construction is expected to begin this fall and conclude in spring 2024.

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The theater group was founded more than 50 years ago by Barbara Ann Teer, who had the foresight to purchase the 64,000-square-foot theater building at the location after it was badly damaged by a 1983 fire. Her vision was to pay for the theater's work with real estate income.

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The move did not quite solve the group's financial problems, and Teer died in 2008. But the theater's CEO Sade Lythcott and other leaders are carrying out Teer's dream with the development plan.

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Lythcott told the Times that before teaming up with Zhukova, a Russian-American art collector and philanthropist, on the project, she had an honest conversation with her about a controversial photo of Zhukova published online in 2014. It showed Zhukova sitting on a chair consisting of a sculpture depicting a Black woman in bondage, and Zhukova apologized for the photo after its publication.

Lythcott, after speaking with Zhukova, told the Times that "it was catalytic in expanding the lens by which she sees the world."

In 2017, the group said it teamed up with L+M Development Partners to build a mixed-use, 20-story building with 240 residential units and a 30,000-square-foot theater at the site. L+M remains part of the project.

[NYT] — *Akiko Matsuda*

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