

The Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company proudly presents

AUGUST WILSON'S
MA RAINEY'S
BLACK
BOTTOM

DIRECTED BY
MARK CLAYTON
SOUTHERS

SEPT. 14TH –
OCT. 1ST 2018

WELCOME



This August Wilson play holds a special place in my heart. It's the play that ushered me into the world of theatre. My first career was that of a photographer. I worked for the New Pittsburgh Courier from 1980 through 1992. I was also the company photographer for the Kuntu Repertory Theatre Company during that time; however I never watched any plays. I would just show up prior to a performance or a dress rehearsal, take a series of photographs and then leave.

One day the founder and artistic director Dr. Vernell Lillie asked if I knew anyone who could videotape a performance. I had just purchased a Betamax video camera and was videotaping various functions. I told her that I could do it. So, now here I am in the Stephen Foster Memorial theater sitting through my first full-length play production. I set up in the back of the theater so that I could navigate the huge stage. This location worked well for me because it also was a good distance from the audience and no one could hear me talk on my Nokia bag phone. Yes, it's true. It was 1984 and my phone calls were clocking in at 25 cents per minute. So the play is going on and I'm on my phone chatting with a friend, in a hushed tone, of course. I'm minding my business and all of a sudden I hear one of the actors cussing out God at the top of his voice.

It actually raised the hairs on my arms. I immediately sat up and told my friend on the phone, "I'm gonna hafta hit you back later." I hung up and commenced to watch the rest of the performance. That actor was the late great Don Marshall, who we just lost several weeks ago. In the role of Levee, he commanded the stage with an ignorant type of swagger that fit his character well. The late great Milt Thompson was also onstage as Cutler, and my good friend and great Griot, the late Bob Gore, was there as Toledo. This experience didn't cause me to immediately jump into theatre; however, it subconsciously had an effect on my thoughts about the world of theatre. This play impacted me enough to have an understanding that theatre can move you. Emotionally it can take you places and hold your attention and teach as well. *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is at the top of my list of Mr. Wilson's American Century Cycle. It's a piece of art that allows us to experience the joy, pain, laughter and tragedy of African Americans in a time that came before us. It's a wonderful roller coaster of emotions. Please fasten your seat belts and prepare yourselves for a journey into and through the world of Mr. August Wilson.

Mark Clayton Southers
Founder & Producing Artistic Director

Cover photo by Duane Rieder.

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August Wilson's Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

Directed by Mark Clayton Southers

Assistant Director Khalil Lee

MA RAINEY	Vanessa German
LEVEE	Jonathan Berry
CUTLER	Chuck Timbers
TOLEDO	Wali Jamal
SLOW DRAG	Sam Lothard
DUSSIE MAE	Shakirah Stephens
SYLVESTER	Malic Williams
IRVIN	Mel Packer
STURDYVANT	Mark Whitehead
POLICEMAN	Thomas Fuchel
MA RAINEY (UNDERSTUDY)	Roxie Robinson (9/20, 9/27, 9/29 @ 2PM)
DUSSIE MAE (UNDERSTUDY)	Shanita Bivins

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom is produced by special arrangement with Samuel French.

August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is set in a Chicago recording studio in 1927. The play runs approximately 3 hours with one 15-minute intermission.

In Memoriam

The theatre community lost four remarkable talents recently, and Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company would like to express our sadness and acknowledge their contributions to our success.

Barbara Russell (June 16, 1933 - August 25, 2018)
Hoodwinked, 2006; *I'll Get You Later*, 2010

Don Marshall (June 18, 1942 - July 6, 2018)
Paul Robeson, 2005; *August in April: Vignettes by August Wilson*, 2005; *August in February: Vignettes by August Wilson*, 2006; *Robert Smalls, Legend of the Black Mariner*, 2006; *The Exile of King Harold*, 2006; *Mr. Ding Dong Daddy*, 2007

Hal O'Leary (April 26, 1925 - June 29, 2018)
Trying, 2009

Marci Woodruff (February 4, 1952 - February 2, 2018)
Directed: *Buried and The Holding Cell*, 2008;
History's Flipside production of *Martin R. Delaney: The Pittsburgh Years*, 2009;
Elder Hostages, 2010; *Congo Square, The Musical*, 2011



PLAYWRIGHT | AUGUST WILSON (April 27, 1945-October 2, 2005) authored *Gem of the Ocean*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Seven Guitars*, *Fences*, *Two Trains Running*, *Jitney*, *King Hedley II*, and *Radio Golf*. These works explore the heritage and experience of the descendants of Africans brought to North America, decade-by-decade, over the course of the twentieth century.

These plays form a compilation entitled *The American Century Cycle*. Mr. Wilson's plays have been produced on Broadway, at regional theaters across the country and all over the world. In 2003, he made his professional stage debut in his one-man show, *How I Learned What I Learned*. His works garnered many awards including Pulitzer Prizes for *Fences* (1987) and for *The Piano Lesson* (1990); a Tony Award for *Fences*; Great Britain's Olivier Award for *Jitney* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, as well as seven New York Drama Critics Circle Awards for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Fences*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Two Trains Running*, *Seven Guitars*, and *Jitney*. Additionally, the cast recording of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* received a 1985 Grammy Award, and Mr. Wilson received a 1995 Emmy Award nomination for his screenplay adaptation of *The Piano Lesson*. Mr. Wilson's early works included the one-act plays *The Janitor*, *Recycle*, *The Coldest Day of the Year*, *Malcolm X*, *The Homecoming*, and the musical satire *Black Bart and the Sacred Hills*. Mr. Wilson received many fellowships and awards, including the Rockefeller and Guggenheim Fellowships in Playwriting, the Whiting Writers Award, 2003 Heinz Award, was awarded the 1999 National Humanities Medal by President Bill Clinton, and received numerous honorary degrees from colleges and universities, as well as the only high school diploma ever issued by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. He was an alumnus of New Dramatists, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a 1995 inductee into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and on October 16, 2005, Broadway renamed the theater located at 245 West 52nd Street - The August Wilson Theatre. Today, he is considered one of America's finest playwrights. New York Public Radio recorded all ten plays in *The American Century Cycle* at the Greene Space, casting many of the actors that worked on the original productions. PBS aired a documentary on Mr. Wilson entitled, "The Ground On Which I Stand," as part of the *American Masters* series. A feature film adaptation of *Fences* released in 2016 won the Best Picture Oscar and many more awards. Mr. Wilson was born and raised in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and lived in Seattle, Washington at the time of his death in 2005. He is immediately survived by his two daughters, Sakina Ansari and Azula Carmen Wilson, and his wife, costume designer Constanza Romero, who is the executor of his estate.

BIOGRAPHIES

DIRECTOR | MARK CLAYTON SOUTHERS and his family of five reside in Pittsburgh's historic Hill District. He is an award-winning playwright, photographer, scenic designer, theatrical producer and stage director. He is the founder and producing Artistic Director of the Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company where he has produced well over 150 full-length and one-act plays, including August Wilson's complete ten play American Century Cycle. Mr. Southers is a published poet and playwright as well. His play *Ma Noah* was the recipient of the 2004 Theodore Ward prize at Columbia College, Chicago. His poem play *Angry Black Man Poetry aka End Angered Species* had a successful run at Teatr Śląski in Katowice, Poland in 2009. His play *Miss Julie, Clarissa and John* was featured at the 2017 National Black Theatre Festival and also had a three week run at the 2017 Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland. He was the Artistic Director for the 2016 year-long August Wilson Festival at Short North Stage in Columbus Ohio. Mark is a member of the Dramatist Guild of America, a board member of the August Wilson House and the former Artistic Director of the August Wilson Center in Pittsburgh PA.

PRODUCTION MANAGER, D.I.A.P. | MONTEZE FREELAND has worked with PPTCO since 2013. He's managed the productions of *Hercules Didn't Wade in the Water*, *Lights Out*, *Findings*, *Seven Guitars*, *Dulcy* and *The Piano Lesson*. In 2015 he organized the Theatre Festival in Black & White and returned as Assistant to the Director of the festival in 2016. In 2017, he directed *Miss Julie, Clarissa and John* at PPTCO, at the National Black Theatre Festival, and at the 2017 Festival Fringe. He is an accomplished actor and was named 2017 Performer of the Year by the Pittsburgh Post Gazette. "As always, it's a pleasure to watch the artists create through their talents."

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR | KHALIL LEE is a native of Pittsburgh. While attending Morris Brown College he strengthened his artistic craft and playwriting at Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia. He furthered his acting experience by performing in several noted productions in Pittsburgh under the direction of Mark Southers in *Hambone*, *Voice*, *Two Trains Running*, and *Uprise*.

SCENIC DESIGNER, TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, SET CONSTRUCTION, SCENIC PAINTER | DIANE MELCHITZKY has designed and built Pittsburgh Playwrights sets since our 2003 debut. She recently worked as a carpenter on the movie *Fences* directed by Denzel Washington. Most recent projects include set design for the Gateway High School and various exhibits at the Clemente Museum and the August Wilson Center.

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER, LIGHTING TECHNICIAN, D.I.A.P. | ASHLEY SOUTHERS is a D.I.A.P. (Do-it-all-person) in training at the Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company. She has worked in the box office, as a lighting tech, costume assistant, house manager, stage manager, assistant stage manager as well as directed for the Theatre Festival in Black & White. She is currently a Senior at Point Park University majoring in creative writing.



LEVEE | JONATHAN BERRY is very excited to be playing Levee in this Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre production of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. He has performed on Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company's stage as Floyd Barton in *Seven Guitars*, Youngblood in the 2016 staged reading of *Jitney* and Citizen Barlow in *Gem of the Ocean*. He won an Onyx Award in 2007 for playing Joe in *Pill Hill*. He has since had the pleasure of working with the Shona Sharif African Dance and Drum Ensemble (Langston Hughes' *Black Nativity* for 18 years), as well as productions for the Theatre Factory, Bricolage, the Organic Theater, the Human Race Theatre Company of Dayton, Ohio, City Theatre, and New Horizon Theater. Jonathan can be seen in the movies *Lightweight* and *The Next Three Days*. Special thanks to Mark Clayton Southers, my friend and theatre big brother for yet another humbling opportunity to bring Mr. Wilson's work to life.



DUSSIE MAE (understudy) & Stage Manager | SHANITA BIVINS *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is the third August Wilson play Shanita has stage managed, *Seven Guitars* and *King Hedley II* being the other two shows. Shanita is Pittsburgh born and raised, and grew up on the Northside. After spending the last 3 years on and behind the stage, she has learned so much and gained much-appreciated experience. August Wilson's way of connecting his characters, by having them share and constantly fight for THEIR truth, is part of what drives her to do a lot of the shows and projects she's done, and will continue to do. Following this production, she will be continuing her passions of acting, producing, and stage managing.



POLICEMAN | THOMAS FUCHEL is glad to be back at Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre for the fourth time. He has performed in theaters across the country, including the August Wilson Center, Pittsburgh Playwrights, Pitt Rep Theatre, Prime Stage Theater, Stage 62, Open Stage Theatre, South Park Theatre, Little Lake Theatre, the Summer Company, the Grand Theater, and other theaters here and in New York. Productions include *The Gammage Project*, *Oliver*, *The Crucible*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Twelve Angry Men*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Picnic*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Something Greater*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Midlife The Crisis Musical*, *Hay Fever*, *Henry and Mom*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Dial M for Murder*, *The Pink Panther*, *Ruined*, and *When We Are Married*. A special thank you to his acting coach/inspiration/muse, his wife Patricia.

BIOGRAPHIES



MA RAINEY | VANESSA GERMAN is a multidisciplinary citizen artist. She works in performance, photography, and sculpture. She has written several evening-length spoken word operas, among them, “root”, which was developed in her time as an August Wilson Fellow. She is a founding member of the August Wilson Center Theater Ensemble, and she’s a 2018 United States Artists Fellow.



TOLEDO | WALI JAMAL has the distinction of having appeared in all ten of August Wilson’s American Century Cycle plays for PPTCO! He recently portrayed August Wilson himself in Mr. Wilson’s autobiographical solo show *How I Learned What I Learned*, making him the only actor in the world to appear in all eleven of August Wilson’s plays! A long-time favorite of PPTCO audiences, his roles in our productions of August Wilson’s plays include: both Boy Willie and Avery in our two productions of *The Piano Lesson*, Hedley in *Seven Guitars* (twice!), Wolf in *Two Trains Running*, Bono in *Fences*, Doub in *Jitney*, Caesar in *Gem of the Ocean*, Toledo in *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, Sterling in *Radio Golf*, Seth Holly in *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, and Elmore in *King Hedley II*. A prolific Pittsburgh actor, he has worked with just about every theatre company in Pittsburgh, including the Public, City, Bricolage, and barebones.



SLOW DRAG | SAM LOTHARD was born in Youngstown Ohio and now resides in Pittsburgh PA. He has written, directed, and performed plays for over ten years, most recently as Mister in August Wilson’s *King Hedley II*. Some of his favorite acting credits include: Dr Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; Sherri Lynn’s *The Bold and the Sanctified*; as well as *Findings*, *Lights Out*, and *Hercules Didn’t Wade in the Water*, all at Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company; Monteze Freeland’s *Kalopsia*; and Dr. Tameka Cage Conley’s opera *A Gathering of Sons*. “I have been blessed to share the stage with some PHENOMENAL cast mates doing yet another play by the great August Wilson. It don’t get no better than this! Thanks to my God, my family and friends and especially my big bro Mark Clayton Southers for all he has done and continues to do in my theater journey. Put God first. Shoot your shot. Chase your dreams.”

BIOGRAPHIES



IRVIN | MEL PACKER discovered Pittsburgh in 1965 when he became a student in the Theatre Department of Carnegie Tech, now CMU, from which he resigned in his sophomore year. He never desired to be on stage as an actor again, although he recently played Andrew Carnegie in Mark Southers’ production about the Homestead Strike of 1892. He has worked as an over-the-road and local trucker, nuclear medicine technologist, and retired as a physician assistant in emergency medicine. Mel is a lifelong activist, anti-capitalist, and is committed to working-class revolution. He dedicates this performance to all who gave their lives for social justice, and especially to the memory of Antwon Rose II, victim of a racist police murder. He wishes to give special thanks to his wife, Emily DeFerrari, for her eternal patience, support, and for being his ethical role model.



MA RAINEY (understudy) | ROXIE ROBINSON hails from small town Elyria. She is so excited to be involved in such a beautiful piece of work. Roxie studied musical theater at Nazareth College of Rochester, but credits her training to her high school mentor and theater director Patricia Price. Roxie’s number one passion is acting and she hopes to one day spread love and light with her talents. She was first introduced to acting in 1991 with a production of *Angels Aware*. As she was too young to be one of the principal actors, but dedicated to auditioning, the director created a role exclusively for her, impressed with her raw talents at the tender age of just 5. It was then that she was bit by the show business bug, and so began her artistic journey.



DUSSIE MAE | SHAKIRAH STEPHENS is a graduate of Howard University. She is currently fulfilling an Arts Management Fellowship with the Alumni Theater Company. Her background in theater goes back all the way to the 4th grade with her first role as Lucy in *You’re a Good Man, Charlie Brown*. Her most recent role was the Gatekeeper in Alumni Theater Company’s production of *The Wiz*, and her favorite role was Monkey #3 in *Seussical*. This show is exciting for her because it is her first show not in a school or ATC setting. Also, she happens to love August Wilson’s work. In the future, Shakirah plans to continue acting and writing and maybe even start producing short plays. Shakirah would like to thank her friends and family for supporting her in her endeavors no matter how large the feat may seem. She also would like to give a special thanks to Bill Nunn for introducing her to August Wilson’s work when she was in high school.

BIOGRAPHIES



CUTLER | CHARLES TIMBERS has been performing for more than 30 years, appearing in more than 30 theatrical plays in Pittsburgh. Charles' most recent plays have been *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* at the Short North Stage Theater in Columbus Ohio, for which he received the Excellence in Acting Award 2016 from the Theater Roundtable of Columbus for his role as Cutler. He was recently seen in *LOTTO* with New Horizons Theater and *The Summer King* with the Pittsburgh Opera. He has appeared in several local and national TV commercials, industrial films, and was a featured actor in the Pittsburgh-filmed movie *The Jacksons: An American Dream*, playing Dr. Hayes. Charles is thrilled to be able to share this stage with such skilled and talented artists. He would like to dedicate this performance to his daughter Nikki and sister Keona. "To God be the Glory."



STURDYVANT & Sound Design | MARK WHITEHEAD is the founder of Saints & Poets Theater, for which he produced and directed the world premiere of Christiane D's *Saffronia*, and the local premieres of Sam Shepard's *The Late Henry Moss* and Donald Freed's *Secret Honor: The Last Testament of Richard M. Nixon*. Other directing credits include *4-H Club*, *Insignificance*, *Comfort Zone*, *The Revenants*, *Cry Havoc*, *Taking Sides*, and *Fool for Love*. Mark has served as Resident Sound Designer for The Unseam'd Shakespeare Company, The Jewish Theatre of Pittsburgh and currently PPTCO. Mark's sound traveled to the 2017 Edinburgh Festival Fringe in PPTCO's production of *Miss Julie*, *Clarissa and John*. Mark was a founding producer of The Dark Night Cabaret performance series and has produced and directed music videos for several local bands.



SYLVESTER | MALIC WILLIAMS is thrilled to be working with PPTCO on this August Wilson classic. Most recently he was seen in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* with Prime Stage Theatre. Malic has also been seen in Throughline Theatre's productions of *Cloud 9* and *Yankee Tavern*; Pittsburgh Musical Theater's production of *Dreamgirls*; and City Theatre's Young Playwrights Festival (2015). Other credits include Shakespeare's *Richard III* as the titular character, Booth in *Topdog/Underdog*, Algernon in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and Sophocles' *Electra* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Next up, Malic will be returning to City Theatre in the Young Playwrights Festival (2018). Malic would like to express gratitude to the cast and crew, his family, friends, and the Pittsburgh Arts community.

BIOGRAPHIES

COSTUME & MAKEUP DESIGN | CHERYL EL-WALKER (a Pittsburgh native) is an award-winning costume design and make-up artist who is also a veteran stage actor/director. Her work has been seen in all ten of August Wilson's plays, completing the American Century Cycle with *King Hedley II*. Her talents have received seven Onyx Awards from the African American Council of the Arts, a Best Director award from the Theatre Festival in Black in White, and the Legacy Award from Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company. Her most recent performance was in *East Texas Hot Links* in the role of Charlesetta, followed by costume and makeup design for *In The Heat of The Night* and *King Hedley II*.

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER | ERIC EARL ELEAM, JR. is a newcomer to the theatre scene. His mother Kim Duban and aunt Pat Jones ensured that music and theatre were a part of his and his older sister Tiffany's lives from a young age. He has studied the piano, recorder, violin, and coronet, as well as enjoying many musicals such as *My Fair Lady*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *Grease*, *West Side Story* and *The Wiz*. This is his first job in theatre, but he is quite excited to try more and can't wait for his first role.

FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER | RANDY KOVITZ has staged fights for many Playwrights productions, including *Seven Guitars*, *Jitney*, *Corps Values*, *In The Heat of the Night* and others. Also for PPTCO, he directed August Wilson's *The Janitor* and Andre Kimo Guest's *Apple Says Yes* for the Theatre Festival in Black and White. His fights have appeared on and off Broadway, at the Kennedy Center, Mark Taper Forum, Yale Rep, South Coast Rep and many others. Highlights include the world premiere productions of *Angels in America* and *Burn This*, the Broadway production of *The Kentucky Cycle*, Sir Peter Hall's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *four seasons* at the Tony-winning Utah Shakespearean Festival. Film credits include *The Ballad of the Sad Café* with Vanessa Redgrave and Keith Carradine, the animated feature *Quest for Camelot*, *The Addams Family* — as fencing double for Raul Julia — and *Racing Daylight* with David Strathairn. Randy is also an actor with many stage, film and TV roles to his credit, and an award-winning film director.

ASSISTANT MAKEUP/COSTUME DESIGN | ARIONA SHERWOOD is a native Pittsburgher who holds a degree in Business Administration. In addition to her work in makeup and costumes, she has stage managed and been a sound technician, and her world revolves around writing every day. She has two beautiful little boys, Ameer and Niyeer. Her production credits include: *Miss Julie*, *Clarissa*, and *John*, *Jitney*, *Fences*, *In the Heat of the Night*, and the 2016 Theater Festival in Black and White. This show is dedicated to all her friends and family that believe in her, and her journey toward becoming a phenomenal woman, but most importantly to God she gives all the glory, thanks, and praise.

LIGHTING DESIGNER | BOB STEINECK is currently resident lighting designer for Texture Contemporary Ballet, Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre, Mercyhurst Univ. Dance Dept., Rennie Harris' PureMovement and RHAW, Pittsburgh Festival Opera and Raphael Xavier Company. Mr. Steineck has toured throughout the US and abroad with both Rennie Harris companies, Reed Dance, Squonk Opera, the Lyon Opera Ballet, Sankai Juku, Phoenix Dance Company, Kirov Ballet Academy and the "America Tour" for Stars on Ice. Television/Video/DVD credits include *A Gathering of Sons* (Pittsburgh Festival Opera), the Dizzy Gillespie All Star Big Band (A&E Cable), the Spyro Gyra concert (PBS), and Johnny A Trio (Warner Bros. Publications). His most recent lighting designs include two world premieres — *Alice* (Cleveland Ballet), and *Funkedified* (New Victory Theatre, NYC, for Rennie Harris). Other designs include *In the Company of Ghosts* (Wehr/Ferraro), *La Boheme Warhola & Rhinegold* (Pittsburgh Festival Opera).

STAFF

PLAYWRIGHT	August Wilson
DIRECTOR	Mark Clayton Southers
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	Khalil Lee
PRODUCTION MANAGER/D.I.A.P.	Monteze Freeland
STAGE MANAGER	Shanita Bivins
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS	Ashley Southers, Eric Earl Elean
SCENIC DESIGNER	Diane Melchitzky
SOUND DESIGNER	Mark Whitehead
LIGHTING DESIGNER	Bob Steineck
COSTUME DESIGNER	Cheryl El-Walker
HAIR & MAKEUP DESIGNER	Cheryl El-Walker
ASST. MAKEUP AND COSTUME DESIGN	Ariona Sherwood
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR/HEAD CARPENTER	Diane Melchitzky
SCENIC PAINTING	Diane Melchitzky
SCENIC CONSTRUCTION	Diane Melchitzky
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER	Randy Kovitz
LIGHTING TECHNICIAN/D.I.A.P	Ashley Southers
SOUND TECHNICIAN	Shanita Bivins
WARDROBE	Cheryl El-Walker, Ariona Sherwood
PROPS	Shanita Bivins, Austin Sills
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