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Sixth production of A Noise Within's 2017-2018 Season

***A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry**

February 25 - April 8, 2018

Press Opening March 3

Directed by Gregg T. Daniel

**Special Event - pre-show conversation on Thursday, March 15 with
Mamie Hansberry, sister of the playwright**

(Pasadena, CA -January 15, 2018) A Noise Within (ANW) presents *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, directed by Gregg T. Daniel, the sixth production of its 26th season performing February 25 to April 8 (Press Opening March 3).

In pre-civil rights America, an unexpected windfall offers a life-changing option for the Youngers, an African-American family living in a cramped Chicago apartment. They struggle with competing dreams and racial intolerance in Lorraine Hansberry's seminal work.

Director Gregg T. Daniel said, "I am in awe of the sheer courage, imagination, and intelligence it took to write *Raisin*—how the mind of a 29-year-old 'Negro' playwright was driven to confront issues of Pan Africanism, feminism, and economic, gender and racial equality in such an eloquent and powerful manner."

He continues, "Here we are, six *decades* later, and the play still speaks to us because it appears that intolerance, bigotry, and racial prejudice has once again found a hideous, contemporary voice in the American consciousness."

ANW co-producing Artistic Director Julia Rodriguez-Elliott said, “*A Raisin in the Sun* was the breakout hit of our 2016 Resident Artist reading festival; we are excited to offer a full production of one of the greatest plays of the 20th century, with Gregg at the helm.”

Geoff Elliott continues: “All season we’ve explored the theme of ‘Entertaining Courage.’ *Raisin* explores courage, the power of hope, the limits of personal agency, and the stressors of our environment that push us towards action.”

A Raisin in the Sun runs from February 25-April 8. Thursday March 15, A Noise Within hosts a pre-performance conversation with Mamie Hansberry, sister of the late Lorraine, from 6pm-7pm.

A Raisin in the Sun runs in rotating repertory with Shakespeare’s *Henry V* (February 4-April 6, 2018), and will be preceded by Michael Frayn’s *Noises Off* (April 21-May 20).

Tickets for *A Raisin in the Sun* and all the spring 2018 productions start at \$25, are available online at www.anoisewithin.org and by phone by calling 626-356-3100. A Noise Within is located on the corner of Foothill Boulevard and Sierra Madre Villa Avenue at 3352 East Foothill Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91107, just north of the Madre Street exit off the 210.

Operating in a state-of-the-art theatre complex in East Pasadena, A Noise Within annually produces seven mainstage productions. It is a cultural and artistic mainstay in the San Gabriel Valley, and is the largest employer of local Equity Actors in Los Angeles County.

The cast of *Raisin in the Sun* includes Ben Cain* as Walter Lee Younger, Toya Turner* as Ruth Younger, Amir Abdullah* as Joseph Asagai, Rosney Mauger as Bobo, Bert Emmett* as Karl Linder, Keith Walker as George Murchison, Sandra McClain* as Lena Younger, Sarah Hollis* as Beneatha Younger, and Sam Christian as Travis Younger. *denotes a member of Actors’ Equity Association

Directed by Gregg T. Daniel, Scenic Design by Stephanie Kerley Schwartz†, Costume Design by Garry Lennont†, Lighting Design by Stacy McKenney Norr, Sound Design by Jeff Gardnert†, and

Choreography by Joyce Guy. Stage Manager is Gabrielle J. Bruno, Assistant Stage Manager is Canelle Irmas and the Assistant Director is Samantha Kofford.

THE LEGACY OF *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

According to *American Theatre* magazine, *Raisin* is one of the ten most produced plays of this current theater season.

When the play debuted in New York in 1959 - the first play written by a black woman to be produced on Broadway, as well as the first with a black director (Lloyd Richards) - Hansberry herself noted that the play introduced details of black life to the overwhelmingly white Broadway audiences. At the same time, director Richards observed that it was the first play to which large numbers of black people were drawn.

The work is notable for its insightful and sensitive depiction of an African American family at a time when the impact of “Jim Crow” laws and the ‘Separate but Equal’ doctrine were soon to be repudiated in the United States. At that time thousands of formerly disenfranchised blacks were hoping to grasp a piece of the American Dream.

The title comes from the poem “Harlem” by Langston Hughes (What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? ... maybe it just sags like a heavy load. Or does it explode?”).

Spike Lee said, “*A Raisin in the Sun* was a revelation to me. It’s still fresh. It is still relevant. Lorraine Hansberry was a visionary.” Frank Rich in *The New York Times*, said that *A Raisin in the Sun* “changed American theater forever.”

Hilton Als, in *The New Yorker* said, “Lorraine Hansberry was an integrationist - she knew the toll the struggle could take. Walter is a deeply political, lonely figure. Hansberry’s radicalism lay in giving a man like him language and making him go the course.”

Ben Brantley wrote in *The New York Times* of the 2004 Broadway revival, “*Raisin* was remarkably prescient in identifying issues that would continue to shape African-American life: black men's struggles for self-assertion in households dominated by strong women; the movement to separate African from American identities; Christianity as both an oppressive and redemptive power; the restlessness of women imprisoned by domesticity -- all these elements come into play in Hansberry's drama. And that's before you get to the plot pivot in which the Younger family plans to move into a white neighborhood.”

ABOUT A RAISIN IN THE SUN AND LORRAINE HANSBERRY

A Raisin in the Sun debuted on Broadway in 1959. With a cast in which all but one minor character is African-American, *A Raisin in the Sun* was considered a risky investment, and it took over a year for producer Philip Rose to raise enough money to launch it. There was disagreement with how it should be played, with focus on the mother or focus on the son. When the play hit New York, Sidney Poitier played it with the focus on the son and found not only his calling but an audience enthralled.

After touring to positive reviews, the play premiered on Broadway at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on March 11, 1959. It transferred to the Belasco Theatre on October 19, 1959, and closed on June 25, 1960, after 530 total performances.

ABOUT LORRAINE HANSBERRY

Lorraine Hansberry was born on the South Side of Chicago on May 19, 1930. Her father founded Lake Street Bank, one of the first banks for blacks in Chicago, and ran a successful real estate business. Her uncle was William Leo Hansberry, a scholar of African studies at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Many prominent African American social and political leaders visited the Hansberry household during Lorraine's childhood including sociology professor W.E.B. DuBois, poet Langston Hughes, actor and political activist Paul Robeson, musician Duke Ellington, and Olympic gold medalist Jesse Owens.

Despite their middle-class status, the Hansberrys were subject to segregation. When she was 8 years old, Hansberry's family deliberately attempted to move into a restricted neighborhood. Restrictive covenants, in which white property owners agreed not to sell to blacks, created a ghetto known as the "Black Belt" on Chicago's South Side. Carl Hansberry, with the help of Harry H. Pace, president of the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company and several white realtors, secretly bought property at 413 E. 60th Street and 6140 S. Rhodes Avenue.

The family was threatened by a white mob, which threw a brick through a window, narrowly missing Lorraine. The state Supreme Court of Illinois upheld the legality of the restrictive covenant and forced the family to leave the house.

The case was then taken to the United States Supreme Court, which reversed the decision on a legal technicality. Although the case did not argue that racially restrict covenants were unlawful, it marked the beginning of their end.

Hansberry moved to New York in 1950 to begin her career as a writer. She wrote for Paul Robeson's *Freedom*, a progressive publication, which put her in contact with other literary and political mentors such as W.E.B. DuBois and Freedom editor Louis Burnham. During a protest against racial discrimination at New York University, she met Robert Nemiroff, a Jewish writer who shared her political views. They married on June 20, 1953 at the Hansberrys' home in Chicago.

In 1956, her husband and Burt D'Lugoff wrote the hit song, "Cindy, Oh Cindy." Its profits allowed Hansberry to quit working and devote herself to writing. She then began a play she called *The Crystal Stair*, from Langston Hughes' poem "Mother to Son." She later retitled it *A Raisin in the Sun* from Hughes' poem, "Harlem: A Dream Deferred."

For *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry drew upon the lives of the working-class black people who rented from her father and who went to school with her on Chicago's South Side. She used

members of her family as inspiration for her characters. Hansberry noted similarities between Nannie Hansberry and Mama Younger and between Carl Hansberry and Big Walter. Walter Lee, Jr. and Ruth are composites of Hansberry's brothers, their wives and her sister, Mamie. In an interview, Hansberry laughingly said "Beneatha is me, eight years ago."

Although Hansberry and Nemiroff divorced before her death, he remained dedicated to her work. As literary executor, he edited and published her three unfinished plays: *Les Blancs*, *The Drinking Gourd* and *What Use Are Flowers?* He also collected Hansberry's unpublished writings, speeches and journal entries and presented them in the autobiographical montage *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*. The title is taken from a speech given by Hansberry in May 1964 to winners of a United Negro Fund writing competition: "...though it be thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such times, it is doubly so, doubly dynamic, to be young, gifted and black!"

Her second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, about a Jewish intellectual, ran on Broadway for 101 performances. It closed on January 12, 1965, the day Hansberry died of cancer at age 35. *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* will be presented a part of the **Words Within** staged reading series on Monday, March 5 @ 7pm. Free reservations can be made at anoisewithin.org

MORE ABOUT ANW'S PRODUCTION

GREGG T. DANIEL (Director, *A Raisin in the Sun*) makes his ANW debut with *Raisin*. He recently directed the

West Coast premieres of Tarrance Arvelle Chisolm's *Br'er Cotton* for Lower Depth Theatre Ensemble, Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs* for Rogue Machine theatre (Ovation-nominated, Best Director), and *Home* by Samm Art Williams for the International City Theatre (ICT). With Rogue Machine, Gregg directed the L.A. premiere of *Honky* by Greg Kalleres (nominated Best Director, Comedy). He is a recipient of the 2016 NAACP Best Director award for the International City Theatre's production of *Fences* by August Wilson (nominated for L.A. Drama Critics Circle, Ovation, and StageScene LA awards.) Other work includes a revival of Alice

Childress' *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White* for the Antaeus Company (Winner Stage Raw Award-Best Revival, Best Ensemble). Additional L.A. credits include Lee Blessing's *Cobb*, Eric Simonson's *Lombardi*, Frank McGuinness' *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (*Broadway World* nomination, Best Director), and Tom Stoppard's translation of *Heroes* for Group Repertory Theatre. For Lower Depth Theatre Ensemble, he's directed the West Coast premiere of Kwame Kwei-Armah's *Elmina's Kitchen* (Winner-NAACP's Best Ensemble). Regionally, he has directed the New Jersey premiere of Katori's Hall's *The Mountain Top* and Matthew Lopez's *The Whipping Man* for Cape May Stage. Gregg is a Founding Member/Artistic Director of Lower Depth Theatre Ensemble (Lower-Depth.com). He is an accomplished actor with over 100 appearances in television and film roles. He is married to actress Veralyn Jones.

Symposium, Conversations, Pay What You Can, Sunday Rush

The run of *A Raisin in the Sun* includes a pre-performance *Symposium* on Wednesday, February 28 at 6:30 pm, post-performance *Conversations* with the artists on Friday March 16 at 8pm, Sunday March 25th at 2pm and Friday March 30 at 8pm and a *Pay What You Can* performance on Thursday, March 1 at 7:30 pm. *Sunday Rush* dates are March 11 at 7pm and March 25 at 7pm.

ENTERTAINING COURAGE - HENRY V

Shakespeare's *Henry V* plays in rotating repertory with *A Raisin in the Sun* in spring 2018, and the season closes with a revival of one of ANW's most popular productions, *Noises Off* by Michael Frayn. With the exception of *Noises Off* and *A Christmas Carol*, all of the season's plays make their A Noise Within debut.

This season's theme is *Entertaining Courage*. "Regardless of where you fall on the political spectrum, we're certainly living in challenging, unprecedented times," says Geoff Elliott, "It seems like many people are trying to figure out what the path forward looks like. While we certainly don't have answers, we thought we'd face that national angst and fear head on by embracing courage and hope."

ABOUT A NOISE WITHIN

A Noise Within, which celebrated its 25th Anniversary last season, was called “an oasis for those who love classic stories” by *The Los Angeles Times*, and is a leading regional producer based in Pasadena, CA. ANW’s award-winning resident company practices a rotating repertory model at their state-of-the-art, 283-seat performing space. This venue, established in 2011, has allowed ANW to expand its audience, surpassing its previous box office, subscription, and attendance records each year.

In addition to producing world-class performances of classical theatre, the organization runs robust education programs committed to inspiring diverse audiences of all ages. Helmed by Producing Artistic Directors Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott, who hold MFAs from San Francisco’s American Conservatory Theatre, A Noise Within truly delivers CLASSIC THEATRE, MODERN MAGIC. <http://www.anoisewithin.org>

Calendar Listing: *A Raisin in the Sun*

By Lorraine Hansberry
Directed by Gregg T. Daniel
At A Noise Within, 3352 E Foothill Blvd, Pasadena, CA 91107

Performances:

Sunday, February 25 at 2pm
Wednesday, February 28 at 7:30 pm
(*Symposium* at 6:30 pm)
Thursday, March 1 at 7:30 pm (*Pay What You Can*)
Friday, March 2 at 8pm
Saturday, March 3 at 8pm (*Opening Night*)
Sunday, March 4 at 2pm
Sunday, March 11 at 2 and 7pm
(*Sunday Rush* at 7pm)

Thursday, March 15 at 7:30pm (*Special Event - Mamie Hansberry*)
Friday, March 16 at 8:00pm (*Conversations*)
Saturday, March 17 at 2 and 8pm
Sunday, March 25 at 2 and 7pm
(*Conversations* after 2pm; *Sunday Rush* at 7pm)
Friday, March 30 at 8pm (*Conversations*)
Saturday, March 31 at 2 and 8pm
Saturday, April 7 at 2 and 8pm
Sunday, April 8 at 2pm

Tickets and information:

Website: www.anoisewithin.org, Phone: 626-356-3100

Regular Prices: Single Tickets from \$25.00, Student Rush with ID an hour before performance \$20.00

Pay What You Can: Thursday, March 1 at 7:30pm - all tickets remaining are Pay What You Can, cash only, at the box office on day of performance starting at 7pm.

Sunday Rush: March 11 at 7 pm and March 25 at 7 pm - all tickets remaining are \$25.00 after 2:30 pm cash or credit at the box office on day of performance.

Groups (10 or more): Adults from \$30/ticket; Students from \$18/ticket

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