

**The second production of A Noise Within's  
2019-2020 Season: THEY PLAYED WITH FIRE**

***Gem of the Ocean***  
**By August Wilson**

**Directed by Gregg T. Daniel**  
**Sept. 28 – Nov. 16, 2019**

**Pasadena, Calif. (Sept. 28, 2019)** – A Noise Within (ANW), California's acclaimed classic repertory theatre company, is proud to present the first chronological chapter in **Pulitzer Prize winner August Wilson's** American Century Cycle, *Gem of the Ocean*, directed by **Gregg T. Daniel**. Daniel previously directed ANW's Ovation Award and Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award-nominated production of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* for the theatre's 2017-2018 season. *Gem of the Ocean* will run **Sept. 28 through Nov. 16, 2019**. Press opening weekend is **Saturday, Sept. 28 and Sunday, Sept. 29**.

August Wilson unfolds the African American legacy in the first chronological episode of his celebrated **American Century Cycle**—a soaring, mystical tale of a man desperate for redemption in 1904 Pittsburgh. Aunt Ester, a 285-year-old “soul cleanser,” sends him on a spiritual journey that dissects the nature of freedom amidst oppression and spurs him to take up the mantle of justice.

“It's enormously gratifying to be working with the first installment of August Wilson's ambitious ten play cycle,” said **Director Gregg T. Daniel**. “*Gem of the Ocean* is a play filled with myth, mysticism, folklore, and history; it's a uniquely American story.”

*Gem of the Ocean* will transport audiences from Pittsburgh's historic Hill District, where Wilson grew up and famously made the setting for his ten-play American Century Cycle, to the mythical homeland in the play known as the City of Bones. Director Gregg T. Daniel recruited **Scenic**

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**Designer Stephanie Kerley Schwartz**, who was tasked with the challenge of bringing the two worlds together on stage.

“The play’s action takes place inside of a house, which serves as both stalwart protection from the outside world, and as a portal to a place of transformation and personal significance,” said Scenic Designer Stephanie Kerley Schwartz. “The goal is to settle the audience into the day to day activities of life in this interior space, and then break it all apart to transport them on a mythical journey led by an elder from another age on a voyage of powerful ancient rituals.”

To celebrate the opening of A Noise Within’s first August Wilson play, ANW’s Noise Now program has commissioned **Los Angeles photographer Ibarionex Perello** to create a photo exhibition that explores the history of slavery and institutional racism to coincide with the opening of *Gem of the Ocean*. Titled **The Three-Fifths Project**, Perello’s work reflects the perpetual sense of tension, anxiety, and insecurity faced by men and women of color, while also evoking a sense of bloodline and legacy. The title is derived from the Three-Fifths Compromise in the United States Constitution, a conceit that not only claimed that blacks were less than human, but that their value was measured by how they benefited the wealth, power, and prosperity of white males. The Three-Fifths Project, presented with **Pasadena Photography Arts**, will be on display through the run of *Gem of the Ocean*, from **Sept. 28 through Nov. 16**.

The first rehearsal of *Gem of the Ocean* took place on Aug. 20, and Director Gregg T. Daniel took time to recognize and commemorate the fact that the month of August marked the beginning of slavery in America 400 years ago.

Daniel stood in front of his cast and said, “Memory insists that we go back and claim the past.” He also celebrated the present, recognizing that in the 2018-2019 season, **August Wilson made *American Theatre* magazine’s “Top 20 Most-Produced Playwrights” list**. A small libation prayer was recited with the cast and crew before the first read-through of the script.

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*Gem of the Ocean* begins 40 years after slavery was abolished, and the play's characters represent the first generation of African Americans who were free and had to learn to navigate a country filled with racism and inequalities.

As the first chronological play in Wilson's American Century Cycle, which details the African American experience throughout the 20th century, *Gem of the Ocean* sets the tone for the rest of the series. *The New York Times* wrote, "August Wilson at the top of his form—a touchstone for everything else he has written."

"We hope to see all 10 of Wilson's American Century Cycle plays produced at A Noise Within in chronological order. It would be an honor for us to do that for our community," concluded **Artistic Directors Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott**.

Single ticket prices for *Gem of the Ocean* start at \$25 and are available at [anoisewithin.org](http://anoisewithin.org), by phone at 626-356-3121, and at the box office located at 3352 East Foothill Blvd in Pasadena, Calif.

## Calendar Listing

*Gem of the Ocean*

By August Wilson

Directed by Gregg T. Daniel

at A Noise Within, 3352 E. Foothill Blvd, Pasadena, CA 91107

## Running Time

Two hours and forty-five minutes, including one 15-minute intermission.

## The Cast and Creative Team

The cast includes (\*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States)

**Aunt Ester Tyler:** Veralyn Jones\*

**Citizen Barlow:** Evan Lewis Smith\*

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**Solly Two Kings:** Kevin Jackson\*

**Black Mary Wilks:** Carolyn Ratteray\*

**Caesar Wilks:** Chuma Gault\*

**Eli:** Alex Morris\*

**Rutherford Selig:** Bert Emmett\*

Directed by **Gregg T. Daniel**. Scenic design by **Stephanie Kerley Schwartz**<sup>†</sup>; costume design by **Angela Balogh Calin**<sup>†</sup>; lighting design by **Jean-Yves Tessier**; sound design by **Martin Carrillo**; choreographer is **Joyce Guy**; assistant director is **Dana Hunt**; make-up design by **Shannon Hutchins** and wig design by **Shelia Dorn**; props master is **Shen Heckel**; dialect coach is **Andrea Odinov**; stage manager is **Emily Lehrer**\* and assistant stage manager is **Ashley Pantenberg**\*. <sup>†</sup> Designer is represented by United Scenic Artists Local USA-829 of the IATSE.

## Sponsors

Lead Sponsor: **Dick and Sally Roberts**

Co-Sponsor: **William and Priscilla Kennedy**

## Performances

Saturday, Sept. 28 at 8 p.m. (Opening

Night & Press Performance #1)

Sunday, Sept. 29 at 2 p.m. (Press

Performance #2)

Friday, Oct. 4 at 8 p.m. (Post-Show

Conversation)

Saturday, Oct. 5 at 2 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 5 at 8 p.m.

Thursday, Oct. 24 at 7:30 p.m.

Friday, Oct. 25 at 8 p.m. (Post-Show

Conversation)

Saturday, Oct. 26 at 2 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 26 at 8 p.m.

Wednesday, Oct. 30 at 7:30 p.m. (Wine

Down Wednesday)

Sunday, Nov. 3 at 2 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 3 at 7 p.m. (Sunday Rush)

Saturday, Nov. 9 at 2 p.m.

Saturday, Nov. 9 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, Nov. 10 at 2 p.m. (Post-Show

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Conversation)  
Friday, Nov. 15 at 8 p.m. (Post-Show  
Conversation)

Saturday, Nov. 16 at 2 p.m.  
Saturday, Nov. 16 at 8 p.m.

## Ticket and Price Information

**Buy Online:** [www.anoisewithin.org](http://www.anoisewithin.org) **Buy Via Phone:** 626-356-3121

**Purchase at Box Office:** 3352 E. Foothill Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91107

**Regular Prices:** Single tickets from \$25, Student Rush with ID an hour before performance \$20.

**Groups (10 or more):** Adults from \$25 to \$50 a ticket, up to 35% off; Students from \$18/tickets.  
Call 626-356-3121 for more information and ask for Subscriber Services Manager Deborah Strang.

**Sunday Rush:** Nov. 3 at 7 p.m. – all tickets remaining are \$25, available online after 12 a.m. day of performance with the code **SUNDAYRUSH** or at the box office, cash or credit, after 2 p.m. day of performance.

## Wine Down Wednesdays

Get a **free glass of wine** with your ticket when attending a Wednesday evening performance.

## ANW's 2019-2020 Season – THEY PLAYED WITH FIRE

“**THEY PLAYED WITH FIRE** indeed! A Noise Within’s 2019-20 season embraces the incandescent power of change,” said ANW Producing Artistic Director **Geoff Elliott**. “Our upcoming titles are peopled with formidable characters – torches in hand – willing to either burn down the house or build a mansion of possibility.”

ANW’s fiery 2019-2020 season began with the California Premiere of Nick Dear’s stage adaptation of Mary Shelley’s 200-year-old gothic novel, *Frankenstein* (directed by Michael Michetti; ran Aug. 11 – Sept. 8, 2019). *Frankenstein* will be followed by the first chronologically in Pulitzer Prize winner

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August Wilson's celebrated American Century Cycle, *Gem of the Ocean* (directed by Gregg T. Daniel; Sept. 22 – Nov. 16, 2019), which will run in rotating repertory with Sam Shepard's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Buried Child* (directed by Julia Rodriguez-Elliott; Oct. 13 – Nov. 23, 2019). The first half of the season will close with family holiday favorite Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (directed by Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott; December 4 – 23, 2019).

The second half of ANW's explosive new season will open with a stirring production of William Shakespeare's emotional romance, *The Winter's Tale* (directed by Geoff Elliott; February 9 – April 11, 2020), and will run in rotating repertory through the spring with Eva Le Gallienne and Florida Friebus' classic adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland* (directed by Stephanie Shroyer; March 1 – April 18, 2020). Stephen Sondheim's Tony Award®-winning musical thriller *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (directed by Julia Rodriguez-Elliott; May 10 – June 7, 2020) will fan the flames before closing out ANW's most ambitious season yet.

ANW Producing Artistic Director **Julia Rodriguez-Elliott** said, "Whether they are teetering on the precipice of redemption (*Gem of the Ocean; The Winter's Tale*) or revenge (*Sweeney Todd*), or haunting revelation (*Frankenstein; Buried Child*), or even an outrageous romp down a rabbit hole (*Alice in Wonderland*), they are all staking their lives on a chance to transform the world around them."

"We invite you to join us as we venture with these risk-takers, revolutionaries, and game changers. We will see you at the theatre," said ANW Producing Artistic Directors Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott.

## About August Wilson

**August Wilson** was born on April 27, 1945, in the Hill District community of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania as Frederick August Kittel, Jr. to Daisy Wilson, a cleaning lady, and Frederick August Kittle, a German immigrant and baker. Wilson's father was absent for most of his life, leaving Daisy Wilson to raise August and his six siblings in a two-room apartment.

In 1958 Daisy Wilson married David Bedford. Growing up, Wilson had a complex experience with

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race. His mother, Daisy, was black, his father, Frederick Kittle, was white, and David Bedford, his stepfather, was black. The complexity of Wilson's experience with race is expressed in many of his plays.

While Wilson was a bright and creative student, he found school life difficult. In 1959, Wilson attended three different schools. He began high school at Central Catholic High School, a predominantly white, private school. There, he was the victim of race-based bullying so extreme that he transferred to Connelly Trade school. However, Wilson quickly grew bored at Connelly Trade school, and transferred once more to Gladstone High School. There, he was accused of plagiarizing a paper he had written, and secretly dropped out of school all together at the age of 15.

After leaving school, Wilson continued to educate himself—he would go to the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh during school hours to study while his mother thought he was at school. During his self-education, he read the works of Langston Hughes and Ralph Ellison, and he learned to love the blues and Bessie Smith's voice. During this time, he began to spend time in restaurants and barbershops around the Hill District simply to listen to the residents' voices and stories. Wilson would later draw on these voices and stories as inspiration for his writing.

In 1962, Wilson enlisted in the U.S. Army, however, he only served for one year. After leaving the Army, he began to work a variety of odd jobs while he wrote poetry. By the late 1960s, Wilson had officially adopted the name August Wilson in honor of his mother, and he became involved in the Black Arts Movement. During this time, he collaborated with poets, artists, and educators, and became the co-founder of the Black Horizon Theater in Pittsburgh. Wilson served as the resident director of the theater company until the mid-1970s, when Black Horizon Theater dissolved. Before the company dissolved, Wilson met Brenda Burton, his first wife. In 1970, they married, and Wilson's first daughter, Sakina Ansari Wilson, was born.

In 1978, Wilson moved to St. Paul, Minnesota. There, Wilson began to focus on playwriting. In 1981, he married Judy Oliver, his second wife. One year later, Wilson was accepted to the National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Connecticut in 1982. During the

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conference, Wilson met Lloyd Richards, the dean of the Yale University School of Drama and the artistic director of the Yale Repertory Theatre. Lloyd Richards was a legend in the theatrical world, especially in black theater. Richards became a mentor for Wilson and eventually directed Wilson's first six Broadway productions. The same year, Wilson's play, *Jitney*, premiered at the Allegheny Repertory Theatre in Pittsburgh as the first play produced in his American Century Cycle, a 10-play cycle depicting the African American experience throughout each decade in the 20th century.

In 1984, Wilson's play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, the second play in Wilson's American Century Cycle, premiered at the Yale Repertory Theatre to great critical acclaim. The production moved to Broadway and earned Wilson his first New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Throughout the 1980s to the early 2000s, Wilson continued to write plays for his American Century Cycle. During this time, he won two Pulitzer Prizes for his writing: one for *Fences* in 1987, and one for *The Piano Lesson* in 1990.

In 1990, Wilson's marriage to Judy Oliver ended, and Wilson moved to Seattle, Washington. There, he met Constanza Romero, a costume designer, and the two married in 1994. Three years later, Wilson's second daughter, Azula Carmen Wilson, was born.

In June 2005, Wilson was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer. He died a few months later, on October 2, in Seattle. His funeral service was held in Pittsburgh, and he is buried in Greenwood Cemetery, not far from his mother, Daisy.

### About August Wilson's American Century Cycle

Over the course of his playwriting career, August Wilson wrote a cycle of ten plays collectively called the **American Century Cycle**. In his cycle, Wilson sets each of his ten plays in a different decade of the 20th century. The result is a chronicle of the complexities of the changing social and historical landscape of the African American experience over the course of 100 years. The plays in Wilson's cycle, except *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, are set in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—the area of Pittsburgh where Wilson grew up.

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When Wilson began writing his plays, he did not have a large-scale cycle in mind. In fact, Wilson wrote the plays out of order—his first play, *Jitney*, is set in the 1970s, his second is set in the 1920s, and his third in the 1950s. Eventually, Wilson realized that he could create a cycle out of his plays. While the ten plays in his cycle all serve a greater narrative spanning 100 years, there is no common thread that runs through all ten of the plays.

Instead, the cycle tells the story of a neighborhood through time—the changes in the community that inhabits the neighborhood, and the challenges the individuals in that community face. In his cycle, Wilson highlights characters who typically go unnoticed in society—an elderly woman in *Gem of the Ocean*, a garbage man in *Fences*—giving voice to otherwise invisible groups. The plays in his cycle also tend to feature spiritual and supernatural elements of African and African American cultures set against the gritty realism of a city plagued by inequality.

### About A Noise Within

**A Noise Within** has been called “an oasis for those who love classic stories” by *Los Angeles Times* and is a leading regional producer based in Pasadena, Calif. ANW’s award-winning resident company practices a rotating repertory model at their state-of-the-art, 324-seat performance space. This venue, established in 2011, has allowed ANW to expand its audience, surpassing its previous box office, subscription, and attendance records year after year.

In addition to producing world-class performances of classic 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 renowned American Conservatory Theatre (A.C.T.), A Noise Within truly delivers **CLASSIC THEATRE, MODERN MAGIC**. <http://www.anoisewithin.org>

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