



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Noise Within continues commitment to playwright August Wilson with electrifying 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom'

PASADENA, Calif (July 14, 2026) — Power. Music. Survival. Legacy. Continuing its long-term commitment to the work of **August Wilson**, **A Noise Within** presents ***Ma Rainey's Black Bottom***, the seventh of the 10 plays in Wilson's landmark American Century Cycle to be produced by the company. Directed by **Gregg T. Daniel**, performances begin **August 29** at A Noise Within's Pasadena home and continue through **September 20**. Four preview performances begin August 23.

Inspired by real-life Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, this groundbreaking work was the first of Wilson's plays to reach Broadway, where it received the 1984 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play. Filled with humor, heart, music and some of the most electrifying dialogue ever written for the stage, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is more than just a classic; it's a powerful conversation that asks the question: Who gets to decide whose voice matters?

"American history is filled with examples of Black artists whose work was celebrated while they themselves were exploited," notes Daniel. "*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* asks how someone holds onto dignity, resilience and self-worth when their art is treated as a commodity."

Set during a 1927 recording session in Chicago, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* transforms an ordinary afternoon into a volatile clash over race, art, power and ownership. As legendary blues singer Ma Rainey battles white producers determined to control both her music and her career, ambitious trumpeter Levee dreams of a future beyond the band. Their competing visions ignite tensions that build toward one of Wilson's most devastating finales.

As A Noise Within moves closer to completing Wilson's ten-play cycle, the productions have fostered an ensemble of artists deeply immersed in his work. Four members of the *Ma Rainey* cast, including **Kai A. Ealy**, **Bert Emmett**, **Alex Morris** and **Gerald C. Rivers**, return after appearing in previous Wilson productions at the theater. ANW resident artist **Amber Liekhus** stars in the title role, with ANW newcomer **Jamar Gilbert** taking on the role of Levee. Joining them are **Francis Edemobi**, **Matt Foyer**, **Jim Nardini** and **CJ Obilom**.

"It's like a rep company — the returning actors understand Wilson's rhythms and musicality, so they teach newcomers what the Wilsonian world requires," Daniel explains. "When veterans speak the language, you can feel a cadence and musicality at the table. This play is itself a musical composition in its dialogue. Characters represent musical parts: the character of Levee is a counter-melody to Ma."

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The *Ma Rainey* creative team includes scenic designer **Tesshi Nakagawa**; lighting designer **Ken Booth**; sound designer **Jeff Gardner**; costume designer **Christine Cover Ferro**; wig and makeup designer **Shelia Dorn**; properties designer **Stephen Taylor**; music director **Byron Smith**; choreographer **Joyce Guy**; fight choreographer **Ken Merck**; dialect coach **Andrea Odinov**; and dramaturg **Dr. Miranda Johnson-Haddad**. The production stage manager is **Sami Hansen**, with **Bryan Tiglio** assisting.

Taken as a whole, the ten plays in Wilson's monumental cycle span a period of 90 years, from *Gem of the Ocean* in 1904 to *Radio Golf* in 1997. With its Chicago setting, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is the only play in the series that doesn't take place in Pittsburgh's Hill District, where Wilson himself grew up. The 10 plays were not written sequentially, so are not connected in the manner of a serial story. Each play stands alone.

A Noise Within is one of the nation's premier classical repertory theater companies. Under the leadership of producing artistic directors **Julia Rodriguez-Elliott** and **Geoff Elliott**, the award-winning resident company produces bold interpretations of classic works while fostering meaningful connections between artists, audiences and the community. In addition to its mainstage productions, A Noise Within offers year-round education and engagement programs that inspire audiences of all ages. Guided by a commitment to equity, inclusion and anti-racist practices, the company strives to make great theater welcoming and accessible to all.

Performances of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* take place **August 29** through **September 20** on **Thursdays, Fridays** and **Saturdays 7:30 p.m.**, with **2 p.m. matinees** every **Saturday** and **Sunday** (no matinee on Saturday, Aug. 29). Four preview performances take place at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 23, and at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 26; Thursday, Aug. 27; and Friday, Aug. 28.

A one-hour **Insiders Discussion Group** will take place prior to the matinee on **Sunday, Aug. 30** beginning at **12:30 p.m.** **Saturday, Sept. 12** at **7:30 p.m.** is "**Black Out Night**," an opportunity for an audience self-identifying as Black to experience the performance together; tickets include a post-show reception (non-Black-identifying patrons are welcome to attend, or to select a different performance). **Post-performance conversations** with the artists will take place **every Friday** (except the preview) and on **Sunday, Sept. 6**. **GalaPro closed captioning** is available at select performances, courtesy of the **Perenchio Foundation**. Student matinees are scheduled on select weekdays at 10:30 a.m.; interested educators should email education@anoisewithin.org.

Tickets to *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* start at **\$41.75** (including fees). Student tickets start at **\$20**. Tickets to the previews on Wednesday, Aug. 26 and Thursday, Aug. 27 will be **Pay What You Choose** starting at **\$10** (available online beginning at noon the Monday prior, and at the box office beginning at 2 p.m. on the day of the performance) Discounts are available for groups of 10 or more.

A Noise Within is located at **3352 E Foothill Blvd., Pasadena, CA 91107**. For more information and to purchase tickets, call **(626) 356-3100** or go to anoisewithin.org.

[Click here](#) to download high-resolution photos.

MORE—MORE—MORE

Details for Calendar Listings 'Ma Rainey's Black Bottom'

WHAT:

Power. Music. Survival. Legacy. Continuing its long-term commitment to the work of **August Wilson**, **A Noise Within** presents ***Ma Rainey's Black Bottom***, the seventh of the 10 plays in Wilson's landmark American Century Cycle to be produced by the company. Set during a single, sweltering afternoon in 1927, "Mother of the Blues" Ma Rainey fights to retain control of her music even as her ambitious trumpeter, Levee, reaches for opportunity in a world determined to hold him back. Against a backdrop of racism and inequity, Wilson's searing drama illuminates the struggle to claim dignity, voice and self-worth.

WHO:

- Written by **August Wilson**
- Directed by **Gregg T. Daniel**
- Starring **Kai A. Ealy, Francis Edemobi, Bert Emmett, Matt Foyer, Jamar Gilbert, Amber Liekhus, Alex Morris, Jim Nardini, CJ Obilom, Gerald C. Rivers**
- Presented by **A Noise Within**, *Julia Rodriguez-Elliott and Geoff Elliott, producing artistic directors*

WHEN:

Aug. 23 – Sept. 20

Previews Aug. 23 – Aug. 28:

- *Sunday at 2 p.m. / Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 7:30 p.m.*

Performances Aug. 29 – Sept. 20:

- *Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. / Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m. (no Saturday matinee on Aug. 29)*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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PHOTOS:

[Click here](#) to download high-resolution photos.

HOW:

anoisewithin.org
(626) 356-3100