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## MEDIA RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**January 8, 2006**

### **ARENA STAGE PRESENTS THE D.C. PREMIERE OF AUGUST WILSON'S *GEM OF THE OCEAN***

**\*\*\* Director Paulette Randall, known as the foremost director of Wilson's work in the U.K., makes this American drama her U.S. directorial debut \*\*\***

(Washington D.C.) Like *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *The Piano Lesson* before it, August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* is a powerful and evocative look at the culture and tradition of 20th century African-American life. In 1904, Citizen Barlow has come North in search for work and finds himself on a tumultuous spiritual journey guided by the wisdom of the mysterious and powerful matriarch Aunt Ester. This Washington premiere of *Gem of the Ocean*, the ninth play in Wilson's historic, award-winning ten-part series, is presented as a tribute to Wilson, a giant of American theater who passed away in 2005. **August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* runs January 26 – March 18 on the Fichandler Stage. The press opening night performance is Thursday, February 1 at 8:00 p.m.**



"August Wilson is an audience and artist favorite at Arena," said Artistic Director Molly Smith. "So it is special to me that we are able to premiere this play, one of his last. Wilson is Shakespeare for African-American performers; his 10-play cycle has a breadth and depth in character work that is thrilling. I welcome British director Paulette Randall, a Wilson expert in her home country, as we continue to forge relationships with directors outside America's borders. It will be fascinating to look at this American work through a different cultural lens."

"August Wilson is the most astonishing storyteller," said director Paulette Randall. "He's not afraid to get into the skin and into the bones of the characters, and that's what I find most exciting to work on with the actors – telling the story in that particular way. This is the second time I've directed *Gem of the Ocean*, but on the Fichandler Stage this will be an entirely new journey of a production for us all."

August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* opened on Broadway in December 2004 starring Tony Award-winner Phylicia Rashad as the mythical matriarch Aunt Ester. The recipient of five Tony Award nominations, Wilson's drama was hailed by *The New York Times* as "a swelling battle hymn of transporting beauty. Theatergoers who have followed August Wilson's career will find in *Gem* a touchstone for everything else he has written." Now Arena is proud to present one of Wilson's last works with a standout cast including veterans of both Arena and Wilson's plays and actors familiar from film and television including HBO's "The Wire" and "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air."

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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 African-Americans, decade by decade, over the course of the 20th century. His plays have been produced at regional theaters across the country and all over the world, as well as on Broadway. In 2003, Mr. Wilson made his professional stage debut in his one-man show, *How I Learned What I Learned*. Mr. Wilson's 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*; as well as several New York Drama Critics Circle Awards for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *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 include 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 Rockefeller and Guggenheim Fellowships in Playwriting, the Whiting Writers Award, 2003 Heinz Award, was awarded a 1999 National Humanities Medal by the President of the United States, 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 Letters, and on October 16, 2005, Broadway renamed the theater located at 245 West 52nd Street The August Wilson Theatre.

**THE CAST OF *GEM OF THE OCEAN***

**Pascale Armand** (*Black Mary*) is making her Arena Stage debut with *Gem of the Ocean*. Her Off-Broadway credits are *Breath, Boom* (Playwrights Horizons) and *Four* (Manhattan Theatre Club). Her regional credits include work at Pittsburgh City Theatre (*A Raisin in the Sun*), Actors Theatre of Louisville (*The Piano Lesson* and *Jitney*), ART (*Pericles*), Syracuse Stage (*Hamlet*, *Blues for an Alabama Sky*), Hangar Theatre (*As You Like It*) and Yale Repertory Theatre (*dance of the holy ghosts: a play on memory*). Ms. Armand has toured throughout Europe with a two-person show developed and directed by Peter Sellars. Her last film appearance was in *Kinsey*. Television credits include "Law & Order: Trial by Jury," "Law & Order: Criminal Intent" and "Strangers with Candy."

**Jimonn Cole** (*Citizen Barlow*) has been seen at The Shakespeare Theatre in *Othello* starring Patrick Stewart (Roderigo), *The Tempest* (Caliban), *Peer Gynt* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*. His Off-Broadway and national tour credits include *The Exonerated*; *Puddin'head Wilson* (Audelco Award nomination – Best Supporting Actor) with The Acting Company; and *Pullman Car Hiawatha* (Drama Desk nomination – Best Revival) and *Museum* with the Keen Company NYC. He wrote *The Last Black Cowboy* which recently made its world premiere at The New York International Fringe Festival. Regionally, Mr. Cole has appeared at Alliance Theatre in the world premiere of *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*; at the New Jersey Shakespeare Theatre in *Macbeth*; at the Delaware Theatre Company in *Diva*; and at the Ahmanson in *Romeo and Juliet*. Mr. Cole can be seen in the upcoming feature film *Spinning into Butter* with Sarah Jessica Parker.

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**Leland Gantt** (*Caesar*) makes his Arena Stage debut after returning to Baltimore's CENTERSTAGE this past spring for Lynn Nottage's *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*. Mr. Gantt understudied Charles Dutton's Levee in the recent Broadway revival of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and originated the role of the multi-dimensional Bones in the Off-Broadway premiere of Oyamo's *Killa Dilla*. Other New York credits include *Carson McCullers* at The Women's Project, *Police Boys* at Playwrights Horizons and *Let Me Live* at The Harold Clurman Theatre (Drama Desk and Audelco Award nominations – Featured Actor). Regional performances include Booster in *Jitney* with the Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Bennie the Jet in *In Walks Ed* with the Cincinnati Playhouse and Iago in *Othello* with the Great Lakes Theatre Festival. Film appearances include *Requiem for a Dream*, *Malcolm X* and *Presumed Innocent*. Television credits include roles on "Law & Order," "Law & Order: S.V.U." and HBO's "The Affair."

**Lynn Godfrey** (*Aunt Ester Tyler*) was honored to perform as Aunt Ester in an excerpt of *Gem of the Ocean* for Arena Stage's Season Preview last spring. Her performance career spans Broadway, television, cabaret and nightclubs. She is the recipient of a Drama Desk Nomination for her Broadway debut in *Eubie!* Her theater credits include *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Damn Yankees* (Lola), *Cinderella* (Step Mother), *No Place to be Somebody* (Cora Mae Beasley) and *Snow Queen* (title role), among others. She can also be seen touring her one woman show *Ladies of Song*, an homage to Ethel Waters, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. She has won the NAACP, Dramalogue and Audelco Theatre Awards among others for her theatrical performances. One of her favorite film credits is *V.I. Warshawski* where she portrayed Kathleen Turner's best friend Sal. TV credits include starring in "704 Hauser," Norman Lear's sequel to "All in the Family," and other appearances including "227," "Amen," "L.A. Law," "Frank's Place" and Oprah Winfrey's "Brewster Place."

**Timmy Ray James** (*Rutherford Selig*) has been seen at Arena Stage in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *How I Learned to Drive*, *The Great White Hope*, *The Royal Family* and *The Crucible*. Other appearances in the D.C./Baltimore area include *Coriolanus* at the Shakespeare Theatre; *The Game of Love and Chance* and *Much Ado about Nothing* at the Folger; *Ten Unknowns* at Signature Theatre; *Patience* and *The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi* at Woolly Mammoth; *The Matchmaker* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* at Ford's Theatre; *Wintertime*, *Of Mice and Men* and *Heaven Valley* (Helen Hayes nomination) at Round House Theatre; *A Taste of Honey* and *I'm Not Rappaport* at Olney Theatre; and *Red Herring*, *5th of July*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* at Everyman Theatre in Baltimore. Mr. James has an M.F.A. in acting from Catholic University and teaches acting at Howard University.

**Clayton LeBouef** (*Eli*) returns to Arena Stage where he performed as Scipio in *The Great White Hope*, *Les Blancs*, *Nothing Sacred*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner* and *Conquest of the South Pole*. He has performed extensively in theaters around the country and locally at the Kennedy Center, Ford's Theatre, Source Theater, Folger Theatre and Baltimore's CENTERSTAGE. Mr. LeBouef is the author of *Tied-Apart: A Story of Students, Singers & South Africa*; *Shero: The Livication of Henrietta Vinton Davis*; *A Place Blessed*; as well as spoken-word pieces he performs under his ancestral name: Cowcaltha. His T.V. credits include "Law & Order" and "Criminal Intent: SVU," as well as "The Corner" and "The Wire" on HBO. From 1993-1999, he portrayed Colonel Barnfather in "Homicide: Life on the Streets." In 2004, he appeared as Harold Thomas in the HBO drama *Something the Lord Made* with Charles Dutton, Gabrielle Union and Mos Def.

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**Joseph Marcell** (*Solly Two Kings*) has acted with The Royal Shakespeare Company, The National Theatre, Shakespeare's Globe, Tricycle Theatre (UK), The Shakespeare Theatre Company, Shakespeare & Co. (US) and in Africa and India. His theater credits include *Antony & Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Under the Black Flag*, *Peer Gynt*, *Death of a Salesman*, *King Hedley II*, *Walk Hard-Talk Loud* and *Master Harold ... and the Boys*. Television includes Geoffrey in "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air," "Madmen and Specialists," "The Bold and the Beautiful," "Dr. Who" and "Eastenders." His directing credits include *Othello* (UK), *Julius Caesar* (LA) and *Crash Pad* (US). Mr. Marcell is a member of Shakespeare's Globe Artistic Directorate (UK). He will be seen in the BBC production of Simon Schama's "Rough Crossings" in Spring 2007.

**THE CREATIVE TEAM**

**Paulette Randall** (Director) has over twenty years of experience directing and writing for the theater, as well as producing for television. Her play *Fishing* was performed at the Young Writers' Festival at the Royal Court in 1982, and she subsequently trained there under Artistic Director Max Stafford Clark. She has since directed over 30 productions in London and the regions, including *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf*, *Lenny Henry – Loud*, the 1993 tour of *Funny Black Women on the Edge* and *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*. Ms. Randall developed a close association with the Tricycle Theatre in North London and with the late August Wilson. In 1993, she directed her first Wilson play there, *The Piano Lesson*, after which he gave Ms. Randall and the Tricycle the exclusive right to mount his plays in England. She followed with *Two Trains Running*, *King Hedley II* and last year's *Gem of the Ocean*. In 2003, Ms. Randall was appointed the Artistic Director of Britain's foremost black theater company, Talawa. She directed five co-productions for Talawa: *Urban Afro Saxons*, *Blest Be the Tie*, *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, *Abena's Stupidest Mistake* and *High Heel Parrotfish*. Ms. Randall is Chairman of the Board of Clean Break Theatre Company, is an occasional consultant for the Arts Council of Great Britain, and has recently been made a Fellow of her alma mater, Rose Bruford College.

**Scott Bradley** (Set Designer) returns to Arena Stage after having designed *Passion Play*, a cycle and *The Great White Hope*. Recent designs include *Intimate Apparel* for the Guthrie Theater, the world premiere of Mary Zimmerman's adaptation of Alessandro Barrico's *Silk* at The Goodman Theater, the premiere of Daphne Greave's *Day of the Kings* at Alliance Theater, *The Grapes of Wrath* at Indiana Rep and Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* at Berkeley Rep. Other designs include *Seven Guitars* (Tony Award nomination and Drama Desk Award), *The Notebooks of Leonardo DaVinci* (Lucille Lortel Award nomination), *Journey to the West* (Bay Area Critic's Award) and the A.R.T. productions of *Ivanov* and *The Idiots Karamatsov*.

**Allen Lee Hughes** (Lighting Designer) counts this as his 63rd design for Arena Stage. He has been associated with Arena since 1969. Broadway credits include *Having Our Say*, *Mule Bone*, and *Once On This Island* which earned him a third Tony Award nomination. The Broadway production of *K2* brought his first Tony nomination. His other design work on Broadway includes *Strange Interlude*, *Accidental Death of An Anarchist* and *Quilters*. Mr. Hughes is the recipient of the 1997 Merritt Award for Excellence in Design and Collaboration and two Helen Hayes Awards. His work has been seen at major theaters throughout the country including the

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Seattle Rep, New York Shakespeare Festival, Guthrie Theater, The Shakespeare Theatre, The Goodman, the Kennedy Center, and Lincoln Center Theatre. Mr. Hughes teaches at New York University and is very proud to have the Arena Stage Fellows program named in his honor.

**Ilona Somogyi** (Costume Designer) previously worked at Arena Stage on *The Rainmaker*, *Anna in the Tropics*, *A Man's a Man* and *Of Mice and Men*. In D.C. she has also designed *Wintertime* at Round House Theater. Recent New York credits include *Celebration* and *The Room* by Harold Pinter, *Hot 'n' Throbbing* by Paula Vogel, *God of Hell* by Sam Shepard, *Controversy at Valladolid* and *Fucking A* at The Public Theater, *Cavedweller*, *Savannah Bay*, and as Associate Designer for *Spamalot*, *The Crucible*, *Vincent in Brixton* and *Art*. Other New York standouts include *Wit*, *Swimming with Watermelons*, *Unwrap Your Candy*, *Brutal Imagination*, *Tabletop* and *Hard Times*. In Europe she has designed costumes at the Norwegian National Ballet and the Dutch production of *Saturday Night Fever*. She has worked regionally at South Coast Rep, Williamstown Theater Festival, Bay Street Theater, Long Wharf Theater, Dallas Theater Center, Florida Stage, People's Light and Theater Co., Westport County Playhouse, Center Stage, Great Lakes Theater Festival, Coconut Grove Playhouse and The Weston Playhouse.

**Timothy M. Thompson** (Sound Designer), a native Washingtonian, has designed for theater and the Smithsonian Institution, produced numerous radio ads and spent the past 12 years as Sound Department Head at Arena Stage. Recent Arena designs include *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*; *The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?*; *Proof*; *A Man's A Man*; *Book of Days*; *South Pacific*; *The Misanthrope*; *Anthems*; *A Moon for the Misbegotten*; *On the Jump*; *Blues in the Night*; *Of Mice and Men*; and *K2*. Mr. Thompson has received Helen Hayes Award nominations for *You Can't Take it with You* and *Revergers' Comedies*. Other designs include *The Blue Room* at Signature Theatre; *Life In Refusal*, *Via Dolorosa* and *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* at Theater J; *Voir Dire* at Long Wharf Theater; *Saki Operas* at the DeCapo Theater; *Life is a Dream* at the University of Maryland; and work on August Wilson's *Jitney* in New York.

**Mark Bly** (Production Dramaturg) is entering his third season as senior dramaturg. Earlier this season he dramaturged Molly Smith's *Cabaret*, Moisés Kaufman's workshop of *33 Variations* and *Noises Off*. Mr. Bly is the director of the Arena Stage **downstairs** New Play Reading Series.

The *Gem of the Ocean* Assistant Costume Designer is **Jessica Wegener**, Hair and Wig designer is **Jon Aitchison**, Makeup Designer is **Sara Jean Landbeck**, Fight Choreographer is **Cliff Williams**, Stage Manager is **Lloyd Davis Jr.**, Assistant Stage Manager is **Kurt Hall**, Rehearsal Assistant is **Erin Albrecht**, Stage Management Fellow is **Victory Joy Murray**, Directing Fellow is **Lileana Blain Cruz** and the Dramaturgy Fellow is **Abdul Ali**.

The Arena Stage 2006/07 season is sponsored by Joan and David Maxwell.

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## Special Events, Ticket Information, and Performance Calendar

### The Salon

**Monday, January 29 at 7:00 p.m.**

**Featuring special guests from *Gem of the Ocean***

In the spirit of artistic and literary salons of the past, The Salon features artistic leaders from Arena Stage in a series of lively, in-depth conversations with the playwrights, actors, directors, designers, dramaturgs and audiences which make Arena Stage so unique. The Salon is free to Arena Stage subscribers and donors (\$75+), and only \$3 for the general public. Reservations must be made through the Arena Stage Sales Office at (202) 488-3300.

### Southwest Night

**Friday, February 2 at 8:00 p.m.**

A special invitation is extended to our Southwest D.C. neighbors to buy \$20 tickets for one specially designated Friday evening performance of each production. Proof of Southwest D.C. residency or employment must be presented at the time of purchase. Tickets are limited to 4 per person and are based on availability. To purchase tickets, call (202) 488-3300 or stop by the Arena Stage Sales Office.

**TICKETS:** Tickets range from \$46-66, with discounts available for students, groups, persons with disabilities and senior citizens. **HOTTIX**, a limited number of half-price, day-of-performance tickets, are available from 90-30 minutes before curtain prior to every performance. **FIVETWENTYFIVE TICKETS**, a limited number of \$10 tickets for patrons aged 5-25, are available for purchase until 5:25 p.m. on the day of performance. (For matinee weekend performances, tickets can be purchased on the day before the performance.)

Sales Office	(202) 488-3300
TTY for Deaf patrons	(202) 484-0247
Group Sales Hotline	(202) 488-4380
Subscriptions	(202) 488-4377
Info for patrons with disabilities	(202) 554-9066

Tickets are available for purchase online at [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org).

### PERFORMANCE TIMES:

Tues., Wed., and Sun. at 7:30 p.m. (Exception: 6:00 p.m. curtain 3/18)

Thurs., Fri., and Sat. at 8:00 p.m.

Sat. and Sun. matinees at 2:00 p.m.

Weekday matinees at 12:00 p.m. on 2/6, 2/28, and 3/14

**Epilogues (post-show discussions):** 2/15 at 8:00 p.m.; 2/27 at 7:30 p.m.

**Sign-interpreted performances:** 2/22 at 8:00 p.m.; 2/25 at 7:30 p.m.

**Audio described performances:** 2/14 at 7:30 p.m., 2/17 at 2:00 p.m.

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