

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

Molly Smith Artistic Director Edgar Dobie Executive Director Zelda Fichandler Founding Director

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FULL COMPANY ANNOUNCED FOR *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*
BY LORRAINE HANSBERRY, DIRECTED BY TAZEWELL THOMPSON
MARCH 31-MAY 7, 2017 AT ARENA STAGE

*** Will Cobbs & Dawn Ursula lead cast featuring 10 out of 12 local performers
in beloved American classic, which comes to Arena Stage for the first time ***

(Washington, D.C.) The play that “changed American theater forever” (*New York Times*) comes to Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater for the first time ever this spring. **Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*** follows the Younger family yearning for a better life far from the cramped confines of their Chicago tenement. The groundbreaking drama is helmed by veteran director **Tazewell Thompson**, who returns to direct his 19th production at Arena Stage. **Due to popular demand, the production has been extended for one week with eight additional performances, running March 31-May 7, 2017 in the Fichandler Stage.**

Leading the cast are **Will Cobbs** (Broadway’s *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*) as Walter Lee Younger and **Dawn Ursula** (Arena Stage’s *Love in Afghanistan*) as Ruth Younger. They are joined by **Joy Jones** (Arena Stage’s *Mary T. & Lizzy K.*) as Beneatha Younger, **Lizan Mitchell** (Broadway’s *So Long on Lonely Street*) as Lena Younger and 11-year-old **Jeremiah Hasty** (MetroStage’s *Uprising*) as Travis Younger.

The primarily local cast includes **Mack Leamon** as Bobo, **Thomas Adrian Simpson** (Arena Stage’s *Carousel*) as Karl Lindner, **Keith L. Royal Smith** (Everyman Theatre’s *Under the Skin*) as George Murchison and **Bueka Uwemedimo** (*The Lion King* on the West End) as Joseph Asagai. Rounding out the cast are **Emmanuel Epongo Jr.** (u/s for Travis Younger), **Brit Herring** (Karl Lindner beginning May 2) and **Valeka J. Holt** (u/s for Ruth Younger, assuming role May 2).

“With race relations once again at the forefront of our mindset, this story of a family’s dignity remains important to tell,” shares Artistic Director **Molly Smith**. “I have wanted to produce *A Raisin in the Sun* at Arena for years. In Washington, with a new administration, it is our job as artists to remind everyone of the humanity around us. *A Raisin in the Sun* is the story of a brave family who can see a future that is better than their present. I know that Tazewell and his talented cast will bring these characters to life in a truly wonderful way.”

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Page 2—Full company announced for *A Raisin in the Sun*

“*A Raisin in the Sun* is a brilliant and important play of deep emotional depth and honesty; a joyous celebration of the human spirit with a proud family holding together to conquer, through love and determination, entrenched racism and residential segregation, issues and themes still unresolved in today's transiting America,” adds **Thompson**. “I'm always happy to return to Arena Stage, my original artistic home since 1988, with an amazing cast and an extraordinary team of designers. I'm excited to tell theater stories in general, and present this classic play, in particular, in my favorite form—in the round, in the Fichandler Stage.”

Lorraine Hansberry (*Playwright*) became the youngest American playwright, fifth woman and only African-American to date to win the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play when *A Raisin in the Sun* appeared on Broadway in 1959. In its authentic depiction of Black American life, the play made it impossible for the American stage to ignore African-American creativity and subject matter thereafter. In 1961, the film version received a special award at the Cannes Film Festival and a Screen Writer's Guild Award nomination. In 1965, Lorraine died of cancer at age 34. Her second Broadway play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, was in its early run when Hansberry died; the curtain came down on that date. *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, an autobiographical portrait adapted by her former husband and literary executor Robert Nemiroff, was posthumously produced in 1969 and toured across the country. In 1970, her play *Les Blancs* ran on Broadway to critical acclaim.

Tazewell Thompson (*Director*) is an international opera and theater director, playwright and teacher. Opera productions in Madrid, Paris, Milan, Tokyo, Cape Town, Vancouver, San Francisco, D.C., Los Angeles, Detroit and NY. Since 1988, he has directed 18 productions at Arena Stage, including *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *M. Butterfly*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Yellowman*, *Playboy of the West Indies* and *The Glass Menagerie*, and more than 75 productions in theaters across the country. His production of *Porgy and Bess* was broadcast live from Lincoln Center (Emmy Award nominations for Best Director and Best Classical Production). His award-winning play *Constant Star* received 14 national productions. His play *Mary T. & Lizzy K.*, commissioned by Arena Stage, is the recipient of the Edgerton Foundation New American Play Award. He will next direct Handel's *Xerxes* (Glimmerglass Festival) and has been commissioned to write the libretto for a new opera for Glimmerglass with composer Jeanine Tesori.

Cast Biographies

Will Cobbs (*Walter Lee Younger*) makes his Arena Stage debut. His most recent theater credits include *Safe House* (Repertory Theatre of St. Louis), *When I Come to Die* (Kansas City Repertory) and *Autumn's Harvest* (Lincoln Center). He has also appeared on *Elementary*, *Madam Secretary*, *Army Wives*, *The Goodwife*, *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* and *The Night Of*.

Jeremiah Hasty (*Travis Younger*) is excited to make his Arena Stage debut. Previous credits include *Caroline, or Change* (Creative Caldron) and *Uprising* (MetroStage). Film credits include *The Trenches*. He has also been featured in several print projects, PSAs for Poison Control Center of America, USDA training videos and on The National Harbor website. Jeremiah is a 5th grade student at St. Ambrose in Cheverly and is currently on the Honor Roll.

Joy Jones (*Beneatha Younger*) returns to Arena Stage after appearing in *Mary T. & Lizzy K.* Off-Broadway credits include workshops at the Lincoln Center Festival, The Public, Playwrights Horizons and Rattlestick. Internationally, Joy performed in *Tantalus* (Royal Shakespeare Company). D.C.-area credits include *The Hard Problem*, *Cloud Nine*, *Belleville* and *Invisible Man* (Studio Theatre), *The Call* (Theater J) and *Agnes Under the Big Top* (Forum Theatre). Select regional credits include *Invisible Man* (Huntington Theatre Company), *Ruined* and *Tantalus* (Denver Center) and *Young Lady from Rwanda* and *Pericles* (PlayMakers Repertory). Film/TV credits include *Tantalus: Behind the Mask* and *The Broken Continent*. Joy received her M.F.A. in acting from UNC-Chapel Hill and received a 2013 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Ensemble for *Invisible Man* at Studio Theatre. Twitter: @JoyJonesTweets.
www.thejoyjones.com

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Page 3—Full company announced for *A Raisin in the Sun*

Mack Leamon (*Bobo*) is thrilled to make his Arena Stage debut. Recent D.C.-area theater credits include *Radio Golf* (Hard Bargain Players); *Coming Home*, *Stick Fly* and *Blues for an Alabama Sky* (Port City Playhouse); *A Raisin in the Sun* (Castaways Repertory Theater); and *The Big A: Scenes from a Vanishing Landscape* (Macomb Theater Company). Mack is a proud graduate of Lincoln University.

Lizan Mitchell (*Lena Younger*)'s Broadway credits include *Electra*, *Having Our Say* and *So Long on Lonely Street*. Off-Broadway credits include *The First Noel*, *Brownsville Song*, *Cell*, *The Hurricane Katrina Comedy Festival*, *Rosmersholm*, *For Colored Girls*, *Gum*, *Salt* and *Ma Rose*. Regional credits include *The Good Peaches* (Cleveland Play House), *The House That Will Not Stand* (Yale Repertory, Berkeley Repertory, Victory Gardens), *An Issue of Blood* (Victory Gardens), *Dead and Breathing* (CATF), *The Last Fall* (Crossroads Theater), *Having Our Say* (McCarter), *Fabulation* (Center Stage) and *Woolly Mammoth*, Pittsburgh Public Theater, TheaterWorks, Goodman, Proposition Theatre, San Jose Repertory, Crossroads Theatre and the Humana Festival. Film/TV credits include *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, *Deadbeat*, *We'll Never Have Paris*, *Golden Boy*, *John Adams* (HBO), *The Good Wife*, *Law & Order*, *The Human Stain*, *The Preacher's Wife*, *Sesame Street* and *The Wire*.

Thomas Adrian Simpson (*Karl Lindner*)'s Arena Stage credits include *Carousel*, *Oliver!*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Mary T. & Lizzy K.*, *My Fair Lady* and *The Light in the Piazza*, among others. D.C. credits include *The Threepenny Opera* and *Company* (Signature Theatre); *Orphie and the Book of Heroes* (Kennedy Center); *1776* and *Liberty Smith* (Ford's Theatre); and *Candide* and *The Boys from Syracuse* (Shakespeare Theatre Company). Regional credits include *Candide* (Goodman); *Quixote* in *Man of La Mancha* (Wayside Theatre); *9 to 5* with Sally Struthers and *Les Misérables* (Riverside Center); and *Outside Mullingar* (New Mexico's Fusion Theatre). Tom is a graduate of the U.N.C. School of the Arts.

Keith L. Royal Smith (*George Murchison*) makes his Arena Stage debut. Past D.C. productions include *Hooded: Or Being Black for Dummies* (world premiere, Mosaic Theater Company). New York credits include *12 Angry Men: True Stories of Being a Black Man in America Today* (Billie Holiday Theater); *Political Snorts* and *Powerful Beyond Measure* (La MaMa); and *Take Me Out* and *Fuente Ovejuna* (Abe Burrows Theatre). Regional credits include *Richard III* and *The Comedy of Errors* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival); *Ruined* and *Under the Skin* (Everyman Theatre); *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (Fabrefaction Theater Company); and *Othello* (Eubie Blake Cultural Center). Film/TV credits include *Nehemiah* (co-produced by Spike Lee), *Landelions*, *Sampling* and commercials. He graduated from New York University, University of the Witwatersrand and Baltimore School for the Arts. Keith sends love and thanks to the entire village.

Dawn Ursula (*Ruth Younger*) is thrilled to return to Arena Stage after performing in *Love in Afghanistan*. Select D.C. credits include *Dot* (Everyman Theatre, resident company member), *Zombie: The American* (Woolly Mammoth, resident company member) and the Angel in *Angels in America I & II* (Round House). She has been nominated for and received Baltimore City Paper and Helen Hayes Awards. TV/film credits include *The Wire* and *Veep* (HBO) and *Prince Among Slaves* (PBS). She has an M.F.A. from The Shakespeare Theatre's Academy for Classical Acting at George Washington University and a B.A. from The University of Virginia. Private Coach Vera Katz. www.dawnursula.com

Bueka Uwemedimo (*Joseph Asagai*) makes his Arena Stage debut. He is a British actor originally from Lagos, Nigeria. At the age of six, his family relocated to London, England where he discovered his passion for performing arts. His previous credits include King Mufasa in Disney's *The Lion King* (West End). Bueka has also performed at the prestigious Royal Ascots for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and her guests. Since relocating to D.C., Bueka has been featured on several nationally recognized TV commercials and was nominated for a Helen Hayes Award for his spirited performance as Ray Heffernon in 1st Stage's award-winning show, *The Good Counselor*. www.BuekaUwemedimo.com

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Page 4—Full company announced for *A Raisin in the Sun*

Emmanuel Epongo Jr. (*Travis Younger u/s*) makes his Arena Stage debut. He lives in Silver Spring, Maryland with his parents and attends Westland Middle School. Emmanuel has been acting since the second grade. He performed in the African play *Shaker Zulu* and *Master Gideon Quest* at the American International School in South Africa. During his time at RCF Elementary School, Emmanuel participated in a school play organized to honor elders in the community. Last December, he performed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Emmanuel also loves to dance and play sports.

Brit Herring (*Karl Lindner replacement*) has appeared Off-Broadway in Shel Silverstein's *The Devil and Billy Markham* (SoHo Playhouse) and *In Paradise* (The Lion Theatre/Theater Row). Most recently, Brit appeared in Everyman Theatre's production of *Great Expectations*, directed by Tazewell Thompson. Regional credits include Shakespeare Theatre Company, The Guthrie, the Kennedy Center, Washington Stage Guild, Infinity Theatre Company, Annapolis Shakespeare and many others. Brit received his M.F.A. from Shakespeare Theatre Company's Academy for Classical Acting at The George Washington University. He works as a voice over artist with The National Library Service for the Blind and Handicapped. www.britherring.com

Valeka J. Holt (*Ruth Younger u/s & replacement*) is thrilled to make her Arena Stage debut! Off-Broadway credits include *Church* (The Public). D.C.-area credits include *Father Comes Home from the Wars Parts 1, 2, & 3* (Round House); *Sunset Baby* (Rep Stage, DC Metro Theater Arts Award winner for Best Actress); *As You Like It* (Shakespeare Theatre Company); and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Annapolis Shakespeare Company, Maryland Theatre Guide nomination for Best Supporting Actress). Regional credits include *Love's Labour's Lost* (Penthouse Theatre) and *In the Continuum* and *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* (Meany Studio). Film credits include *The Runaways* and *For Entertainment Purposes Only*. Valeka has her M.F.A. in acting from The University of Washington. She is the owner of V Studios, a boutique Acting Conservatory. Instagram and Facebook: @valekajholt and @thevstudios. www.vstudios.simplybook.me

The creative team for *A Raisin in the Sun* includes Set Designer **Donald Eastman**, Costume Designer **Harry Nadal**, Lighting Designer **Robert Wierzel**, Original Composition & Sound Designer **Fabian Obispo**, Wig Designer **Anne Nesmith**, Dialect Coach **Gary Logan**, Stage Manager **Christi B. Spann** and Assistant Stage Manager **Marne Anderson**.

For full company bios please visit arenastage.org/shows-tickets/the-season/productions/a-raisin-in-the-sun/.

A Raisin in the Sun is generously sponsored by Altria. Additional support is provided by JMA Solutions and Sheila Stampfli.

Post-Show Conversations

Connect with our shows beyond the performance at a post-show conversation with artists and staff—April 12, 18, 25 and 26 following the noon performance; April 18 following the 7:30 p.m. performance; and April 27 following the 8:00 p.m. performance.

Production Information

A Raisin in the Sun

By Lorraine Hansberry

Directed by Tazewell Thompson

In the Fichandler Stage | March 31-May 7, 2017

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Page 5—Full company announced for *A Raisin in the Sun*

ABOUT: Lorraine Hansberry's groundbreaking masterpiece follows the Younger family yearning for a better life far from the cramped confines of their Chicago tenement. Hope arrives in the form of an unexpected financial windfall, but when they realize they have differing definitions of the American dream, which dreams get realized and which deferred? *A Raisin in the Sun* paints the African-American experience in brilliant and powerful strokes, as vibrant and vital today as they were in 1959.

CAST:

Walter Lee Younger: Will Cobbs
Travis Younger: Jeremiah Hasty
Beneatha Younger: Joy Jones
Bobo: Mack Leamon
Lena Younger: Lizan Mitchell
Karl Lindner: Thomas Adrian Simpson
George Murchison: Keith L. Royal Smith
Ruth Younger: Dawn Ursula
Joseph Asagai: Bueka Uwemedimo
Travis Younger u/s: Emmanuel Epongo Jr.
Karl Lindner replacement: Brit Herring
Ruth Younger u/s & replacement: Valeka J. Holt

CREATIVE TEAM:

Director: Tazewell Thompson
Set Designer: Donald Eastman
Costume Designer: Harry Nadal
Lighting Designer: Robert Wierzel
Original Composition & Sound Designer: Fabian Obispo
Wig Designer: Anne Nesmith
Dialect Coach: Gary Logan
Stage Manager: Christi B. Spann
Assistant Stage Manager: Marne Anderson

Plan Your Visit

TICKETS: Tickets for *A Raisin in the Sun* are \$40-90, subject to change and based on availability, plus applicable fees. For information on savings programs such as pay-your-age tickets, student discounts, Southwest Nights and hero's discounts, visit arenastage.org/shows-tickets/single-tickets/savings-programs.

Tickets may be purchased online at arenastage.org by phone at 202-488-3300 or at the Sales Office at 1101 Sixth St., SW, D.C.

Sales Office/Subscriptions: 202-488-3300
Group Sales Hotline for 10+ Tickets: 202-488-4380
TTY for deaf patrons: 202-484-0247
Info for patrons with disabilities: 202-488-3300

PERFORMANCE DATES:

Sunday, Tuesday & Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, Friday & Saturday at 8:00 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday at 2:00 p.m.

Weekday matinees at noon on Wednesday, 4/12; Tuesday, 4/18; Tuesday, 4/25; Wednesday, 4/26; & Tuesday, 5/2

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Page 6—Full company announced for *A Raisin in the Sun*

Full calendar: tickets.arenastage.org/single/PSDetail.aspx?psn=23065

Audio-described performances: 4/29 at 2:00 p.m.

Open-captioned performances: 4/19 at 7:30 p.m. & 4/20 at 8:00 p.m.

ARENA STAGE CAFÉ: Prix fixe meals are available at Richard's Place, Arena Stage's casual dining café, and include a choice of soup or salad, main entrée and dessert. Pre-ordered meals are only \$22 (\$25 if purchased that day). To pre-order and see the menu, call 202-488-3300 or visit arenastage.org/plan-your-visit/the-café/. The café opens two hours before the show, and reservations are recommended. To **pre-order drinks** for up to 50% savings (\$6 house wine and beer), visit tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007.

To **pre-order drinks** from the Catwalk Café for up to 50% savings (\$6 house wine and beer), visit tickets.arenastage.org/cart/precart.aspx?p=1007.

METRO: Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is only one block from the Waterfront-SEU Metro station (Green Line). When exiting the station, walk west on M Street toward Sixth Street, and the main entrance to the Mead Center is on the right.

PARKING: Parking is available in Arena Stage's on-site garage. Subscribers may purchase parking in advance for \$16. Single ticket buyers may purchase parking in advance for \$19 or on the day of the performance for \$22 on a first-come, first-served basis. Limited handicapped parking is available by reservation. Advanced parking must be reserved by calling 202-488-3300. The entrance to the Mead Center garage is on Maine Avenue between Sixth and Seventh streets, and the garage closes one hour after the day's last performance ends. Patrons can also park at the Public Parking Garage at 1101 Fourth Street, one block from the Mead Center, for \$14. Street parking is also available along Maine Avenue.

VALET PARKING: Arena Stage offers valet service at no additional cost to patrons with accessibility needs who call 202-488-3300 in advance to request valet parking. On days when valet parking is being used for accessibility, it is also available to general patrons one hour prior to show time for \$25, based on availability. To use valet parking, pull up to the main entrance on Sixth Street.

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Director Edgar Dobie, is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. Arena Stage produces plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep and dangerous in the American spirit, and presents diverse and ground-breaking work from some of the best artists around the country. Arena Stage is committed to commissioning and developing new plays and impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement. Now in its seventh decade, Arena Stage serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000.

arenastage.org

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