

ARENA STAGE MEDIA RELEASE

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

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ARENA STAGE ANNOUNCES PROGRAMMING FOR THE AUGUST WILSON FESTIVAL KICKING OFF THE 2019/20 SEASON

***Events include a Design Panel, Writers Panel,
Master Class, Women of Wilson Panel and more***

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater will kick off the company's season-long **August Wilson Festival** on Friday, September 13, 2019 with performances beginning for *Jitney*. Ruben Santiago-Hudson directs the 2017 Broadway production – recipient of the 2017 Tony Award for Best Play Revival. This is the first of two full productions as part of the Festival, which continues Arena Stage's tradition of showcasing the work of American Giants in the theater, following festivals for Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee and Eugene O'Neill.

Arena Stage is proud to celebrate the Pulitzer Prize-winning giant by showcasing a variety of discussions, events and panels that reflects August Wilson's (1945- 2005) legacy of American theater. Arena has produced nine out of the 10 plays in Wilson's American Century Cycle, which chronicles the black experience in America throughout the 20th century.

"Arena Stage has had a love affair with August Wilson. When considering influential American playwrights, August Wilson is a giant among giants," shares **Artistic Director Molly Smith**. "While his American Century Cycle has been read and performed in its entirety and his plays are produced all over, we are focusing on the impact he has and how he changed the landscape of American theater. His ideas, language and artistry pulled American theater into the 21st century, before we had even gotten there ourselves."

The first event celebrating August Wilson will be a Designers Panel: Building the World of August Wilson. This will be held on September 16, 2019 in the Kogod Cradle and moderated by **Constanza Romero Wilson**, costume designer and collaborator. The panel will feature several designers who worked with Wilson and helped define the world of his plays, including members of the *Jitney* design team. A reception will be held from 6:30 – 7 p.m. with the panel taking place from 7– 8:30 p.m.

Additionally, on September 16, 2019, students from Howard University and Georgetown University will take part in a private Master Acting Class with **Ruben Santiago-Hudson**. Students from both universities will share scenes they have prepared from August Wilson plays and dig deep into the Wilsonian acting style and craft with Santiago-Hudson. Other events celebrating Wilson include a Writers Panel: On the Shoulders of Giants — August Wilson's Dramatic Legacy, which will take place between performances of *Jitney* on September 28, 2019 from 5:30 – 7 p.m.

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in the Molly Smith Study. This panel will feature contemporary playwrights inspired by Wilson and his work, including poet-playwright **Marcus Gardley** (Arena's *Every Tongue Confess*), with additional panelists announced at a later date.

Following the October 17, 2019 performance of *Jitney*, a post-show discussion with **Paul Ellis**, Wilson's nephew and executive director of the August Wilson House in Pittsburgh, PA, will take place in the Kreeger Theater.

Leading up to the production of **Seven Guitars**, Arena will host a Women of Wilson Panel on April 29, 2020 in the Molly Smith Study from 6 – 7 p.m. This will consist of a panel of women, including award-winning actress, director and producer **Michele Shay** (Broadway's *Seven Guitars*), who have originated and defined Wilson's strong female characters. The panel will be moderated by **Dr. Soyica Colbert**, chair of the Department of Performing Arts, director of Theater and Performance Studies and a professor of African American Studies at Georgetown University. Colbert was a dramaturg for Arena's 2018 production of Wilson's *Two Trains Running*.

Additional events include a documentary film screening centering around the life and legacy of Wilson and community discussion panels centering around relevant topics, including Gentrification in D.C. and African American Music and Society. Both panels are in collaboration with the August Wilson Society.

Additional information regarding dates and panelists will be announced at a later date. RSVPs are encouraged by visiting [here](#).

August Wilson Festival Programming:

Designers Panel: Building the World of August Wilson

Date: September 16, 2019

Location: Kogod Cradle

Time: 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Master Acting Class with Ruben Santiago-Hudson

Date: September 16, 2019

Location: Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater

Writers Panel: On the Shoulders of Giants — August Wilson's Dramatic Legacy

Date: September 28, 2019

Location: Molly Smith Study

Time: 5:30 – 7 p.m.

Post-Show Discussion with Paul Ellis

Date: October 17, 2019

Location: Kreeger Theater

Time: Following the 8 p.m. performance of *Jitney*

Women of Wilson Panel

Date: April 29, 2020

Location: Molly Smith Study

Time: 6 – 7 p.m.

Full productions:

August Wilson's *Jitney*

By August Wilson

Directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson

In the Kreeger Theater | September 13 – October 20, 2019

August Wilson's *Jitney* opens Arena Stage's season-long Festival celebrating the Pulitzer Prize-winning giant with Ruben Santiago-Hudson directing his 2017 Broadway production – recipient of the 2017 Tony® Award for Best Play Revival. The dramatic story of a Pittsburgh jitney station, a symbol of stability, struggles against an oppressive lack of opportunity and unnerving neighborhood gentrification that threaten the way they live and work. The drivers resist powerful forces while coming to grips with their pasts to fulfill their own hopes and dreams for the future. Arena Stage's presentation kicks off the National Tour of one of this late playwright's masterpieces.

August Wilson's *Seven Guitars*

By August Wilson

Directed by Tazewell Thompson

In the Fichandler Stage | April 3 – May 3, 2020

The 1940s Pittsburgh is the backdrop for August Wilson's fifth American Century Cycle play and the second production in the August Wilson Festival. Seven lives are interconnected when old friend and blues singer Floyd Barton vows to turn his life around after a surprise windfall leaves him hopeful for a second chance. Infused with rich and soaring blues rhythms, this "rich and exceptionally vivid" (*Variety*) play pits the desire for a better future against the harsh realities ultimately leading to heartbreaking and unescapable circumstances.

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, under the leadership of Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Producer 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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