



Curt Columbus, The Arthur P. Solomon and Sally E. Lapidés Artistic Director, Jennifer Canole, Interim Executive Director
201 Washington Street • Providence • Rhode Island 02903 • www.trinityrep.com

FOR IMMEDIATE January 25, 2022

CONTACT: Laura Weick, Communications Associate • (401) 453-9226 • lweick@trinityrep.com

AUGUST WILSON'S *GEM OF THE OCEAN* TO RUN AT TRINITY REP

Mythic journey by an American legend plays Feb. 24 – March 27

PROVIDENCE, RI: Trinity Repertory Company's next production in the 2021-22 Season is **August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean***, the first play chronologically in the iconimac playwright's American Century Cycle. Directed by resident company member **Jude Sandy**, *Gem of the Ocean* features a multigenerational cast of local artists. This show runs February 24 – March 27 with a press opening night on Wednesday, March 2 at 7:30 pm. Tickets start at \$27, and more information is available at trinityrep.com/gem.

Set in 1904 Pittsburgh where slavery was still living memory, *Gem of the Ocean* offers a searing and mystical exploration of freedom, justice, and reclamation. Racked with secret guilt, a desperate Citizen Barlow seeks refuge at the home of ancient Aunt Ester. Renowned for soul cleansing, Ester sends Citizen on an epic journey to the City of Bones, to find redemption and renewed purpose.

Gem of the Ocean, which premiered in 2003 at the Goodman Theater in Chicago, chronologically begins August Wilson's ten-play American Century Cycle, chronicling decade-by-decade the heritage and experience of African Americans over the course of the 20th century. In order of the decade in which they are set, the American Century Cycle's plays include *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*. Each of these plays, except *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is set in the Hill District of Pittsburgh. While most of the plays share a common location and some share characters, the connection is strongest between *Gem of the Ocean* and *Radio Golf*, which Trinity Rep produced in 2020. There are direct familial relationships between the characters in the two plays, which bookend the Cycle.

"*Gem of the Ocean* is one of the greatest American plays, from one of its greatest playwrights," Trinity Rep Artistic Director **Curt Columbus** said. "Of all of Mr. Wilson's Century Cycle plays, this one has been a personal

favorite of mine since I first saw it nearly twenty years ago in the spring of 2003 at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. I have been eager to produce it for years now, and it has found its perfect life at Trinity, with this extraordinary creative team led by director and company member Jude Sandy. This glorious story, with its rich characters and deep connections to history, is not to be missed.”

The production’s cast of actors includes resident company members **Mauro Hantman** and **Joe Wilson, Jr.** as Rutherford Selig and Caesar, respectively. Brown/Trinity Rep MFA student **Christopher Lindsay** will play Citizen Barlow. The production will also include Brown/Trinity Rep alum **Liz Morgan** as Black Mary, guest artist **Dereks Thomas** as Eli, and former resident company member **Ricardo Pitts-Wiley** as Solly Two-Kings. **Rose Weaver**, also a former resident acting company member, features as Aunt Ester in her first role at Trinity Rep in over 20 years.

Prior to *Gem of the Ocean*, Trinity Rep produced five of August Wilson’s American Century Cycle plays: *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* in 1987, *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone* in 1989, *Fences* in 1992, *The Piano Lesson* in 2001, and *Radio Golf* in 2020. Joe Wilson, Jr. portrayed the lead character Harmond Wilks, who is the grandson of his *Gem of the Ocean* character Caesar Wilks, in *Radio Golf*. Ricardo Pitts-Wiley is one of Rhode Island’s prime interpreters of the Wilson canon: at Trinity Rep, he played Levee in *Ma Rainey*, Jim Bono in *Fences*, Doaker in *The Piano Lesson*, and Elder Joseph Barlow in *Radio Golf*. He has also appeared in August Wilson plays at other theaters, including Mixed Magic Theater in Pawtucket, of which Pitts-Wiley is a co-founder. Finally, Rose Weaver appeared as Dussie Mae in *Ma Rainey* and Berniece in *The Piano Lesson*. *The Piano Lesson* was Weaver’s last show at Trinity Rep, and in *Gem of the Ocean* she reunites with her co-star Pitts-Wiley.

Resident company member **Jude Sandy** returns to the August Wilson canon as director following his production of August Wilson’s *Radio Golf* in 2020. A resident company member since 2016, Sandy has appeared on stage as an actor in addition to his work as a director. He co-directed the 2018-19 Season production of *black odyssey* with fellow company member Joe Wilson, Jr. Sandy most recently appeared as an actor at Trinity Rep in 2019’s *A Christmas Carol* as Ebenezer Scrooge. Prior to that, he received great accolades for his work as Seymour in the 2018-19 Season’s *Little Shop of Horrors*. Sandy has also appeared on Broadway, off-Broadway, and is a graduate of the Brown/Trinity Rep MFA program.

“In *Gem of the Ocean*, Wilson captivates us with a soulful everyman drama that asks what defines us as racialized human beings in America,” Jude Sandy said. “How do we build the solidarity and self-assurance to commit as individuals to a collective liberation that goes deeper than a legislation of civil rights? This story set in 1904 feels sharply relevant to what we’re living through today, as we re-examine how the freedoms African Americans and other marginalized groups have fought for continue to be contradicted by real-life events that expose still powerful forces of oppression. Can ritual and communal practices that reach into our distant histories replenish and renew us to the mission of making freedom real for all? *Gem of the Ocean* asks African American people and all Americans: Who are you, really? What choices do history, heritage and the realities of the world around us demand of you?”

Sandy will work with **Taavon Gamble** (assistant director), **Michael Évora** (music director), **yaTande Whitney V. Hunter**, (movement director), **Michael McGarty** (set design), **LeVonne Lindsay** (costume design), **Alejandro Fajardo** (lighting design), and **Broken Chord** (sound design).

August Wilson’s plays have been produced at regional theaters across the country and all over the world, as well as on Broadway. Wilson garnered many awards, including a Pulitzer Prize for *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson*, as well as two Tony Awards (*Fences*), and multiple New York Drama Critics Circle awards. He received a National Humanities Medal, and was inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame. *Fences* was adapted into a 2016 film of the same name featuring former Trinity Rep actor Viola Davis, who won an Academy Award for her performance, and Denzel Washington, reviving the roles they played on Broadway. A film of *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, also featuring Viola Davis in the role of Ma Rainey, released in 2020 to critical acclaim.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Trinity Rep requires all attendees to proof of full vaccination against COVID-19 (at least 14 days have passed since the final dose), or proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken in the prior 72-hours, or proof of a negative COVID-19 antigen test taken in the prior 6-hours. All patrons regardless of vaccination status must wear masks over their nose and mouth at all times while inside the venue (unless actively eating or drinking). Details of Trinity Rep’s current health and safety protocol can be found at trinityrep.com/health.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Continuing Trinity Rep’s tradition of offering affordable tickets for all, the theater will have discounted previews of *Gem of the Ocean*. Thursday, February 24 is a Pay What You Wish performance. Pay What You Wish tickets go



on sale on the day of the performance at 2:00 pm in-person or on the phone- and are limited to one per person. Other special performances for this production include Open Captioned performances of the show on February 27, March 23, 26, and 27 at 2:00 pm and March 23, 24, 25, and 26 at 7:30 pm. The Sensory-Friendly performance of *Gem of the Ocean* is on Wednesday, March 16 at 7:30 pm.

One hour before each performance, a cast member will lead a Prologue discussion. This 30-minute spoiler-free discussion and Q&A about the show's themes and production process is included with every ticket. Additional community engagement events will be announced at a later date.

August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* is supported in part by an award from **The National Endowment for the Arts**. The Media Sponsor for this production is **Rhode Island Monthly**. Trinity Rep's 2021-22 Season is sponsored in part by the **Ocean State Job Lot Charitable Foundation** and the **Rhode Island State Council on The Arts (RISCA)**. **110 Grill** is Trinity Rep's Opening Night Sponsor, and **Southwest Airlines** is the Official Airline of Trinity Rep.

TRINITY REPERTORY COMPANY

Rhode Island's Tony Award-winning theater, Trinity Rep has created unparalleled professional theater for and with its community since its founding in 1963. Trinity Rep strives to facilitate human connection and has been a driving force behind the creativity that fuels and defines the region for more than 50 years.

Trinity Rep is committed to reinventing the public square and inspiring dialogue by creating emotionally-stimulating live productions that range from classical to contemporary and innovative education programs for all ages and abilities. Its annual production of *A Christmas Carol* has brought families together for more than four decades and made memories for over a million audience members. The 2021-22 Season launched in November with the holiday classic and continues with four subscription series productions which will run January through June, 2022: *Tiny Beautiful Things*, August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*, *Sueño*, and *Fairview*. **For more information on the 2021-22 Season, visit Trinity Rep's website at www.TrinityRep.com.**



AT A GLANCE

August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*

February 24– March 27, 2022

Director Jude Sandy

Assistant Director Taavon Gamble

Music Director Michael Évora

Movement Director yaTande Whitney V. Hunter

Set Designer Michael McGarty

Costume Designer LeVonne Lindsay

Lighting Designer Alejandro Fajardo

Sound Designer Broken Chord

Stage Manager Alec E. Ferrell

Assistant Stage Manager Amanda Kosack

Cast: The cast of this production features resident company members **Mauro Hantman** as Rutherford Selig and **Joe Wilson, Jr.** as Caesar. Joining them are Brown/Trinity Rep student **Christopher Lindsay** as Citizen Barlow, Brown/Trinity Rep alum **Liz Morgan** as Black Mary, guest artist **Dereks Thomas** as Eli, and former resident company members **Ricardo Pitts-Wiley** and **Rose Weaver** as Solly Two-Kings and Aunt Ester, respectively.

August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* Opening Press Night | Wednesday, March 2 at 7:30 pm

Invitations and RSVP instructions coming soon

Pay What You Wish Feb. 24 at 7:30 pm

Open Caption Performances Feb. 27, March 23, 26, and 27 at 12:00 pm; March 23, 24, 25, and 26 at 7:30 pm

Sensory Friendly Performance March 16 at 7:30 pm

Website www.trinityrep.com/gem

Ticket Office (401) 351-4242; 201 Washington Street, Providence, RI 02903

Group Sales (401) 453-9238; discounts for groups of 10 or more.

Ticket Prices Starting at \$27

Season Sponsors Ocean State Job Lot Charitable Foundation and RISCA

Production Sponsor National Endowment for the Arts

Production Media Sponsor Rhode Island Monthly



Official Airline of Trinity Rep Southwest Airlines

Opening Night Sponsor 110 Grill