



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A Noise Within continues commitment to August Wilson's 'American Century Cycle' with 'The Piano Lesson'

PASADENA, Calif (September 10, 2024) — On the heels of critically acclaimed **A Noise Within** productions of *Gem of the Ocean*, *Seven Guitars*, *Radio Golf* and *King Hedley II*, director **Gregg T. Daniel** returns to direct August Wilson's ***The Piano Lesson***: the fourth play in Wilson's extraordinary 10-play "American Century Cycle"; the second to win a Pulitzer Prize; and the fifth in A Noise Within's commitment to stage them all. Performances begin **October 19** and continue at the company's Pasadena home through **November 10**. Previews begin October 13.

Written in Wilson's always enthralling prose, *The Piano Lesson* weaves together elements of history and spirituality to create a haunting story about reckoning with a complicated past. In 1936 post-Depression Pittsburgh, Berniece (**Nija Okoro**) finds herself pitted against her newly arrived brother, Boy Willie (**Kai A. Ealy**), who is determined to sell a family heirloom: a piano decorated with images of their African ancestors carved by their enslaved grandfather. To Berniece, the piano represents a family legacy that must be preserved. Boy Willie sees it as a means to letting go of the past in order to move forward. As friends and relatives (**LeShay Tomlinson Boyce**, **Jernard Burks**, **Madison Keffer**, **Alex Morris**, **Gerald C. Rivers** and **Evan Lewis Smith**) get caught up in the dispute, a dynamic, gripping portrait emerges of a family haunted by its history and wrestling with its future.

"How does one accept one's legacy when it's filled with hurt and pain?" asks Daniel. "How do you gain a sense of self worth, how do you know who you are, unless you fully inhabit and accept your past, including the pain? This is the battle going on between Berniece and Boy Willie. Like all Wilson's plays, *The Piano Lesson* is infused with African mysticism and ancestral spirits. It's also filled with the blues. Berniece must find her song, find her music."

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 nine of them set in Pittsburgh's Hill District, where Wilson himself grew up. But the plays were not written sequentially and are not



connected in the manner of a serial story. Each play stands alone. Many of the characters recur or are referenced in several of the plays, which enriches the audience experience each time a new one is viewed.

“When I’ve guest-directed Wilson plays at other venues, it was always just one production of one play,” Daniel continues. “But *A Noise Within* has been audacious enough to want to do the entire cycle, which gives me the opportunity to see how these plays are in conversation with one another, how Wilson laid them out. And it’s thrilling to see audiences begin to recognize the overlapping themes and characters. Being able to do these plays back-to-back is one of the greatest gifts I could have as a director. There’s something very exciting about knowing that the next one is coming, and the next one after that, and knowing that our audience is tracking across the entire cycle.”

The creative team for *The Piano Lesson* includes composer and music director **Maritri Garrett**; choreographer **Joyce Guy**; scenic designer **Tesshi Nakagawa**; lighting designer **Brandon Baruch**; sound designer **Jeff Gardner**; costume designer **Alethia Moore-Del Monaco**; wig and makeup designer **Shelia Dorn**; properties designer **Stephen Taylor**; dialect coach **Andrea Odinov**; and dramaturg **Dr. Miranda Johnson-Haddad**. The production stage manager is **Lanae Wilks**, with **Bryan Tiglio** assisting.

A Noise Within has been called “an oasis for those who love classic stories” by the *Los Angeles Times* and is a leading regional producer based in Pasadena, California. Under the leadership of Elliott and Rodriguez-Elliott, the award-winning resident theater company is honored to represent the entire community at its state-of-the-art, 324-seat performance space. In addition to producing world-class performances of classic theater, the organization runs robust education programs with the goal of inspiring diverse audiences of all ages. ANW is committed to anti-racist policies and practices across the entirety of the organization. By interpreting its mission to fully engage audiences through community and artist-centered work in multiple creative disciplines, ANW is striving to be a theater that better serves the entire community.

Performances of *The Piano Lesson* take place **October 19** through **November 10** on **Thursdays, Fridays** and **Saturdays 7:30 p.m.**, with **2 p.m. matinees** every **Saturday** and **Sunday** (no matinee on Saturday, Oct. 19; dark Thursday, Oct. 31). Four preview performances take place at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 13, and at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 16; Thursday, Oct. 17; and Friday, Oct. 18.

A one-hour **INSiders Discussion Group** will take place prior to the matinee on **Sunday, Oct. 20** beginning at **12:30 p.m.** The performance on **Thursday, Oct. 24** 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, Oct. 27**. Student matinees are scheduled on select weekdays at 10:30 a.m.; interested educators should email education@anoisewithin.org.

Tickets to *The Piano Lesson* start at **\$51.50** (including fees). Student tickets start at **\$20**. Tickets to the previews on Wednesday, Oct. 16 and Thursday, Oct. 17 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 www.anoisewithin.org.

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

Details for Calendar Listings 'The Piano Lesson'

WHAT:

A Noise Within continues its commitment to August Wilson's "American Century Cycle" with *The Piano Lesson*, the fourth play in Wilson's extraordinary 10-play cycle that explores the Black experience in 20th century America decade-by decade. A captivating story about legacy, identity and cultural heritage unfolds in 1930s Pittsburgh, where a brother and sister are locked in a bitter dispute. At the center of their debate is a precious family heirloom—a piano with the faces of their ancestors carved into it. While one sees an important history worth preserving, the other sees the key to unlocking a brighter future. In Wilson's enthralling prose, this Pulitzer Prize-winning play weaves together elements of history and spirituality, creating a haunting story about reckoning with a complicated past.

- Written by **August Wilson**
- Directed by **Gregg T. Daniel**
- Starring **LeShay Tomlinson Boyce, Jernard Burks, Kai A. Ealy, Madison Keffer, Alex Morris, Nija Okoro, Gerald C. Rivers, Evan Lewis Smith**
- Presented by **A Noise Within, Geoff Elliot and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott, producing artistic directors**

WHEN:

Previews Oct. 13 – Oct. 18

Performances Oct. 19 – Nov. 10

- **Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.:** Oct. 16 ONLY (preview)
- **Thursdays at 7:30 p.m.:** Oct. 17 (preview), Oct. 24**, Nov. 7 (dark Oct. 31)
- **Fridays at 7:30 p.m.:** Oct. 18 (preview), Oct. 25†, Nov. 1†, Nov. 8†
- **Saturdays at 2 p.m.:** Oct. 26, Nov. 2, Nov. 9 (no matinee on Oct. 19)
- **Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.:** Oct. 19 (Opening Night), Oct. 26, Nov. 2, Nov. 9
- **Sundays at 2 p.m.:** Oct. 13 (preview); Oct. 20*, Oct. 27**, Nov. 3, Nov. 10

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PHOTOS:

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HOW:

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