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## **ROUND HOUSE THEATRE ANNOUNCES NEW 2020-2021 SEASON**

ENGAGING DIGITAL PROGRAMMING FOR FALL/WINTER INCLUDES IMMERSIVE TAKE ON THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE, FOUR-WEEK FESTIVAL HONORING LIVING LEGEND, CROSS-COASTAL WORLD PREMIERE, AND CLASSES FOR ALL AGES, PLUS RETURN TO IN-PERSON PRODUCTIONS IN SPRING 2021

Bethesda, Md. (September 14, 2020) – Round House Theatre announces a new lineup of plays, conversations, and education offerings for its 43rd Season, which includes digital programming for the fall and winter and a return to live productions in its Bethesda theatre in spring 2021. The Fall/Winter Virtual Season offers an exciting slate of timely and innovative programming designed to be experienced digitally by audiences in the DC Metro Area and beyond in partnership with . The season will feature a weeklong run of **American Dreams** to kick off the participatory play’s multi-city, pre-election tour; **The Work of Adrienne Kennedy: Inspiration & Influence**, a four-week festival highlighting the celebrated experimentalist; and the world premiere of **The Catastrophist**, based on the life and work of award-winning “virus hunter” Nathan Wolfe. *See page 3 for full season programming details.*

“This fall and winter are all about exploring new ways to tell stories and interact with audiences. Rather than a diminished version of what we would produce in person, everything we’re programming is the best of what digital can do, in both form and content,” states Artistic Director **Ryan Rilette**. “*American Dreams* is perfectly timed for the election. The show asks the important question of what it means to be a citizen, but in a fun game show style that uses new technology to engage audiences directly, even from home. Adrienne Kennedy’s plays are beautiful, poetic conversations on race and power that are just as necessary now as they were fifty years ago. They deserve to be widely produced in person as soon as they can, but we’re excited to showcase exactly why that is with an online festival that anyone in the world can experience. Finally, *The Catastrophist* is truly a new play for this exact moment. Lauren Gunderson has not only written a deeply moving story about the man who has been sounding the alarm on global pandemics for years, she’s done it in a way that fully embraces its digital presentation.”

Round House's virtual season begins with **American Dreams** (October 5 – 11, 2020), created by writer **Leila Buck** (*Love Letter to Lebanon*) and director **Tamilla Woodard** (*Where We Stand, Hadestown* on Broadway). *American Dreams* is a participatory performance that imagines a world where the only way to gain U.S. citizenship is by competing in a televised game show. The playful, interactive production uses voting, polling, Q&As, and more to allow audiences members each night to directly affect the outcome of the show. Following a sold-out run at The Cleveland Public Theatre as a stage production, *American Dreams* has been developed by NYC's Working Theater into a live online event. "This smart, provocative play deserves to go on to be produced in as many U.S. cities as are on the map," raved *The Plain Dealer*. Round House's weeklong presentation will be the first regional theatre stop in a national tour co-produced with Working Theater, Salt Lake Acting Company, HartBeat Ensemble, The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, and Marin Theatre Company.

Next, Round House Theatre, in association with McCarter Theatre Center, presents **The Work of Adrienne Kennedy: Inspiration & Influence** (November 14 – December 12, 2020), a four-week festival celebrating the award-winning experimentalist. Four of Kennedy's will be produced as virtual theatrical experiences, with a new play released each week: **He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box**, **Sleep Deprivation Chamber**, **Ohio State Murders**, and the world premiere of **Etta and Ella on the Upper West Side**. The festival will also feature a series of dynamic online discussions about Kennedy's lasting influence, allowing audiences everywhere to engage with the works of one of American theatre's most widely studied yet rarely produced playwrights. *The Work of Adrienne Kennedy: Inspiration & Influence* is sponsored by the RPM Fund. Additional events and details to be announced.

In January of 2021, Round House Theatre and Marin Theatre Company will co-produce the world premiere of **The Catastrophist** by **Lauren Gunderson**. America's most produced playwright has written a new story about award-winning virologist Nathan Wolfe, who also happens to be her husband. A leader in the efforts to track and combat global outbreaks like Ebola and swine flu, Nathan has been speaking about the need for pandemic insurance for years. *The Catastrophist* is an interactive, one-person show that explores his life and work, presented entirely digitally. Dates and creative team to be announced.

In addition to new artistic productions, **Round House Theatre Education** is offering virtual programming this fall for students of all ages through classes, performance companies, and in partnership with PTAs and schools. All classes are led live by teaching artists committed to fun and interactive activities, and supplies will be mailed directly to students' homes. Round House will also release new **Theatre Education Challenges** to keep students busy. Originally introduced as part of the Round House at Your House summer programming, Theatre Education Challenges are free, age-appropriate at-home activities for grades K-3, 4-6, and

Teens. To learn more about virtual education offerings from Round House, visit [RoundHouseTheatre.org/Education](http://RoundHouseTheatre.org/Education)

These virtual events will be followed by **three live, in-person shows** beginning in spring 2021. The health of artists, audiences, students, and staff remains Round House's top priority, and the theatre will continue to follow national and local guidelines for safety, which may include reduced capacity, mandatory masks, and socially-distanced seating upon reopening. If circumstances and health guidelines still do not permit in-person gatherings in spring 2021, some or all of the productions will become virtual. More details to be announced.

"Round House has been working hard to develop a new season of rich, dynamic programming for our community ever since early June when we announced the suspension of in-person performances for 2020," says Managing Director **Ed Zakreski**. "Though we can't wait to welcome everyone back into the theatre when it is safe to do so, we are also excited to use virtual programming as an opportunity to respond to our ever-changing world and foster meaningful conversations with more people than ever."

### **2020-2021 FALL/WINTER VIRTUAL SEASON DETAILS**

#### ***American Dreams***

**Created by Leila Buck and Tamilla Woodard**

**Written by Leila Buck**

**Directed by Tamilla Woodard**

**OCT 5 - 11, 2020**

Welcome to *American Dreams*, a government-run game show where contestants compete for the ultimate prize: instant citizenship to the United States. As a member of the online studio audience, you (yes, you!) get to decide which of three hopeful immigrants most deserves the privilege of joining "the greatest nation on earth." With live audience interaction, voting, Q&As, and more, *American Dreams* is a playful, participatory exploration of American values. What do we choose to believe? How do those choices shape us? Just in time for the election, Round House is proud to host *American Dreams* for the week-long kickoff to its nation-wide virtual tour. "It's a Game. It's a Show. It's America!"

#### **ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM**

**Leila Buck** (Writer/Co-creator/Performer) is a Lebanese American writer, actor, facilitator and educator. She has performed and developed work at the Public, NYTW, Cleveland Public, Brooklyn Museum, Mosaic Theater at Arena Stage, California Shakespeare Theater, and the Wilma (Barrymore Award) and performed and taught across China, Australia, Europe and 11 Arab countries.

**Tamilla Woodard** (Director/Developer) is the new Co-Artistic Director of Working Theater, former BOLD Associate Artistic Director at WP Theater, and the co-founder of PopUP Theatrics. She also served as the associate director of *Hadestown* on Broadway. Recently named one of 50 Women to Watch on Broadway, Tamilla is a graduate of Yale School of Drama, where she currently teaches. Last season her work included the Lucille Lortel nominated *Where We Stand* by Donnetta Lavinia Grays for WP Theater and Baltimore Center Stage, Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* at American Conservatory Theater and direction and co-conception of *Warriors Don't Cry*, a Co-production of The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts and TheaterWorksUSA.

*American Dreams* was originally developed in collaboration with Jens Rasmussen, Osh Ghanimah, and Imran Sheikh. The cast features Andre Ali Andre, Leila Buck, India Nicole Burton, Jens Rasmussen, Imran Sheikh and Andrew Valdez.

Working Theater is the lead producer for the virtual production of *American Dreams* in partnership with Round House Theatre, Salt Lake Acting Company, HartBeat Ensemble, The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, University of Connecticut, and Marin Theatre Company, co-commissioned by Arizona State University and Texas Performing Arts, with support from the JKW Foundation.

ABOUT WORKING THEATER

Working Theater believes the transformative experience of live theater should not be a luxury, but a staple. Now in its 36th season, Working Theater continues its mission to produce theater for and about working people—the essential workers of any city or town—and to make play going a regular part of our audiences' cultural lives. By making productions relevant, accessible and affordable regardless of geography or socioeconomic status, Working Theater strives to always acknowledge the city's diversity while seeking to unite us in our common humanity. Working Theater is under the leadership of Co-Artistic Directors Mark Plesent and Tamilla Woodard and Managing Director, Laura Carbonell Monarque.

[www.theworkingtheater.org](http://www.theworkingtheater.org)

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***The Work of Adrienne Kennedy: Inspiration & Influence***

**NOV 14 – DEC 12, 2020**

Hailed as “American theatre’s greatest and least compromising experimentalist” (*New York Times*), Adrienne Kennedy is one of the most prolific and widely studied living playwrights. Since bursting onto the scene in 1964 with *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Kennedy’s enthralling lyrical dramas have influenced generations of storytellers, from Suzan Lori-Parks to Robert O’Hara, Shonda Rhimes to Jeremy O. Harris. Despite her outsized influence, three Obie

Awards, and induction into the Theater Hall of Fame, Adrienne Kennedy is not a household name. This festival is a celebration of why she should be. Round House shines a light on four deeply personal stories from Kennedy's astonishing body of work with four weeks of virtual theatrical experiences and dynamic conversations, offering audiences the opportunity to discover Kennedy's singular voice—a startling mix of the surreal with the all too real. *Additional events to be announced.*

### ***He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box***

**By Adrienne Kennedy**

**NOV 14, 2020**

It is 1941, and Kay and Chris are in love. Yet the letters they exchange are not tender professions, but painful reminiscences—of Chris' wealthy white father who laid the architecture for local segregation, of Kay's brutalized Black mother whose death remains a mystery, and of the myriad forces that separate them. Written in 2018, Adrienne Kennedy's newest work is a brief but expansive memory play that conjures “dread, romance and a tragic surrealism all at once” (*New York Times*). *He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box* is a heartbreaking collage of family memories, historical specters, and theatrical allusions, hypnotically woven together with a poetry that is distinctively Kennedy's own.

### ***Sleep Deprivation Chamber***

**By Adam P. Kennedy and Adrienne Kennedy**

**NOV 21, 2020**

“I'm an American citizen, could you please let me up and breathe?” Teddy Alexander gasps out these words to the police officer who has beaten, dragged, and pinned him in the driveway of his family's Arlington home—all because of a broken taillight. Teddy is a young Black college student studying theatre, but his senior year becomes a waking nightmare when the officer accuses him of assault. Written by Adrienne Kennedy and her own son, Adam, the semi-autobiographical drama shifts between Teddy's trial and the unrelenting letters his sleepless mother writes in his defense. Although it won the Obie Award for Best New American Play nearly 25 years ago, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* is a chilling meditation on race and powerlessness that remains painfully relevant today.

### ***Ohio State Murders***

**By Adrienne Kennedy**

**DEC 5, 2020**

When asked by Ohio State University to speak about the violent imagery in her work, Suzanne Alexander answers with her own story of brutality and betrayal. The accomplished writer attended Ohio State in the 1950s, but instead of academic sanctuary and self-discovery, Suzanne experienced a dark landscape of pain—not only exploitation, kidnapping, and

murder, but also the insidious violence of segregation, ostracization, and misogynoir. Blending captivating monologue with haunting memories, *Ohio State Murders* is a poignant reminder of human cruelty, past and present.

### ***Etta and Ella on the Upper West Side***

**By Adrienne Kennedy**

**DEC 12, 2020 | World Premiere**

Etta and Ella Harrison are astoundingly gifted scholars, deeply connected sisters, and dangerously bitter rivals. They frequently write and teach together, and even their separate works are unnervingly similar, often sourced from their own family history. Now, after a lifetime of competition, they are on the verge of destroying each other. Adrienne Kennedy intricately blends monologue, dialogue, voiceover, and prose to create an experience that is part experimental play, part narrative thriller, and wholly unforgettable. Set against the gothic backdrop of their academic New York world, *Etta and Ella on the Upper West Side* is a taut, kaleidoscopic tale of ambition and madness—brought to theatrical life for the very first time.

#### ABOUT ADRIENNE KENNEDY

Award-winning playwright, lecturer, and author **Adrienne Kennedy** was born in Pittsburgh in 1931 and attended Ohio State University. Her plays include *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (Obie Award), *June and Jean in Concert* (Obie Award), *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, *A Rat's Mass*, *The Owl Answers*, *Motherhood 2000*, *Electra and Orestes* (adaptation), *She Talks to Beethoven*, *An Evening with Dead Essex*, *A Lesson in a Dead Language*, and *The Lennon Play*. She is the recipient of an Obie Award for *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*, which she co-authored with her son Adam. It premiered at the Public Theater and was produced by Signature Theatre Company, which devoted an entire season to Ms. Kennedy's work. Other awards include a Guggenheim award, the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Award, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award for Literature, and the American Book Award for 1990. Her published works include *In One Act*, *Alexander Plays*, and *Deadly Triplets*, all published by University of Minnesota Press, and *People Who Led to My Plays* (a memoir), originally published by Knopf and now in paperback by Theatre Communications Group, which will also publish *He Brought Her Heart Back in a Box and Other Plays* in fall of 2020. Her plays are taught in colleges throughout the country, in Europe, India and Africa. She has been a visiting lecturer at Yale University, New York University and University of California at Berkeley, where she was Chancellor's Distinguished Lecturer in 1980 and 1986. She was also commissioned to write plays for Jerome Robbins, the Public Theater, Mark Taper Forum, Juilliard School and the Royal Court in England. Ms. Kennedy has lived in Africa, Italy and London and last fall was a visiting professor in Harvard University's English Department.

ABOUT MCCARTER THEATRE CENTER

Under the leadership of award-winning Artistic Director Sarah Rasmussen, Managing Director Michael S. Rosenberg and Special Programming Director William W. Lockwood, McCarter's mission is to create world-class theater and present the finest artists for the community engagement, education, and entertainment. Winner of the 1994 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, world premieres include Christopher Durang's *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* (2013 Tony Best Play); Tarell Alvin McCarey's *The Brother/Sister Plays*, Emily Mann's *Having Our Say*, and Danai Gurira's *The Convert*. Due to COVID-19, McCarter has pivoted to offer virtual programming including McCarter@HOME and McCarter Online Classes, reaching new audiences across the world. More at [mccarter.org](http://mccarter.org)

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***The Catastrophist***

**By Lauren Gunderson**

**JAN 2021, DATES TBA | World Premiere**

How do you plan for catastrophe? Virologist Nathan Wolfe, named one of *TIME*'s 100 Most Influential People in the World for his work tracking Ebola and swine flu, proposed pandemic insurance years before the novel coronavirus outbreak. No one bought it. Now, in a post-COVID world, we hear his story—presented entirely digitally. *The Book of Will* playwright Lauren Gunderson returns with a time-jumping tale based on the life and work of Nathan Wolfe (who also happens to be her husband). An interactive deep dive into the profundities of scientific exploration and the harrowing realities of facing your own mortality, *The Catastrophist* is a world premiere theatrical experience built of and for this moment in time.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

**Lauren M. Gunderson** has been one of the most produced playwrights in America since 2015, topping the list twice including in 2019/20. She is a two-time winner of the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award for *I and You* and *The Book of Will*, the winner of the Lanford Wilson Award and the Otis Guernsey New Voices Award, a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and John Gassner Award for Playwriting, and a recipient of the Mellon Foundation's Playwright Residency with Marin Theatre Company. She studied Southern Literature and Drama at Emory University, and Dramatic Writing at NYU's Tisch School, where she was a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship. She co-authored the *Miss Bennet* plays with Margot Melcon, and her play *The Half-Life of Marie Curie* is available on Audible.com. Her work is published at Playscripts (*I and You*; *Exit Pursued By A Bear*; *The Taming*; and *Toil and Trouble*), Dramatists Play Service (*The Revolutionists*; *The Book of Will*; *Silent Sky*; *Bauer*, *Natural Shocks*, *The Wickhams* and *Miss Bennet*) and Samuel French (*Emilie*). Her picture book *Dr. Wonderful: Blast Off to the Moon* is available from Two Lions/Amazon.

[LaurenGunderson.com](http://LaurenGunderson.com)

ABOUT MARIN THEATRE COMPANY

Marin Theatre Company is the Bay Area's premier mid-sized theatre and the leading professional theatre in the North Bay, producing a six-show season focused on new American plays. MTC is committed to the development and production of new plays, with a comprehensive New Play Program that includes productions of world premieres, two nationally recognized annual playwriting awards and readings and workshops by the nation's best emerging and established playwrights. MTC's numerous education programs serve more than 4,500 students from over 40 Bay Area schools each year. MTC strives to create intimate, powerful and emotional experiences that engage audiences to discuss new ideas and adopt a broader point of view. Marin Theatre Company believe in taking risks and inspiring people to participate in live theatre, regardless of personal means. MTC celebrates the intellectual curiosity of our community and believes that theatre is an important tool to help build empathy. MTC was founded in 1966 and is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Subscription packages to Round House Theatre's 2020-2021 Virtual Fall/Winter Season are now available for \$120 and can be purchased online at RoundHouseTheatre.org, or by calling the Box Office at 240.644.1100. As always, subscribers enjoy increased flexibility with free ticket exchanges and pay no service charges. Fall/Winter subscribers also receive priority ticket access to the spring 2021 shows, whether in-person or virtual, as well as other perks when Round House returns to the theatre.

Patrons who previously purchased subscriptions for Round House's originally announced 2020-2021 Season will be contacted directly about their tickets.

TICKET INFORMATION

*American Dreams* runs from October 5 to 11, 2020. Performances are live, Monday and Tuesday at 7:00pm, Thursday through Sunday at 7:00pm, and Saturday and Sunday matinee at 2:00pm. Capacity for each performance is limited. Tickets are available for \$30.

*The Work of Adrienne Kennedy: Inspiration & Influence* runs from November 14 to December 12, 2020. Festival passes to all four plays are available for \$60, and tickets to each individual show are available for \$15. Each play will be released on a specific date (as listed above) and will be available to view for a limited time.

Tickets can be purchased by calling 240.644.1100 or ordering online at RoundHouseTheatre.org. If you have any questions, our Box Office associates will be happy to assist you. Associates are working remotely, Monday through Friday, 11:00am – 5:00pm.

## ABOUT ROUND HOUSE THEATRE

Round House Theatre is one of the leading professional theatres in the Washington, DC area, producing a season of new plays, modern classics, and musicals for more than 40,000 patrons each year at our theatre in Bethesda. Round House has been nominated for 197 Helen Hayes Awards and has won 37, including four Outstanding Resident Play Awards and the Charles MacArthur Award for Original New Play in 2016. Round House's lifelong learning and education programs serve more than 5,000 students each year at its Education Center in Silver Spring, in schools throughout Montgomery County, and at our Bethesda theatre. Cornerstone programs include Free Play, which provides free tickets for students age 13-college, the Teen Performance Company, which culminates in the student-produced Sarah Metzger Memorial Play, Summer Camp for students in grades K-12, and a full slate of classes for Adults & Youth.

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