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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



**ROUND HOUSE THEATRE & OLNEY THEATRE CENTER
OPEN 2026-2027 SEASONS WITH**

**AUGUST WILSON'S
*MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM***

Directed by Lili-Anne Brown

**September 9 - October 11, 2026
at Round House Theatre**

BETHESDA, Md. (August 5, 2026) – Round House Theatre and Olney Theatre Center continue their longstanding partnership with a co-production of August Wilson's blistering masterpiece, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Directed by Helen Hayes Award winner **Lili-Anne Brown** (*FELA!*, also co-produced by Round House and Olney), the story is widely regarded as one of Wilson's most searing and enduring plays. The production runs September 9–October 11, 2026, at Round House Theatre, which celebrates its 50th anniversary in the 2026-2027 season. More information and tickets may be found [here](#).

Featuring **Nicole Michelle Haskins** in the title role, alongside **Ro Boddie, Zach Brewster-Geisz, Chris Genebach, Yao Dogbe, Michael Glenn, Jaylen Henderson, Derrick Truby, Craig Wallace,** and **Kanysha Williams**, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is set in a Chicago recording studio in 1927 and follows the legendary "Mother of the Blues" and her band through a single, tension-filled afternoon. As musicians clash over ambition, artistry, race, and power, Wilson's electrifying dialogue builds toward a devastating conclusion that remains as urgent today as when the play premiered in 1984. Filled with rousing blues music, sharp humor, and profound humanity, the play examines the exploitation of Black artists while celebrating the resilience and transformative power of their art.

"There's a well-worn phrase in Black culture: 'they want our rhythm, but not our blues.' *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is an elegant exploration of this sentiment," says **director Lili-Anne Brown**. "Wilson's writing is musical, deeply human and painfully relevant. It asks us to interrogate who gets valued, who gets to profit, and what is lost when dreams are repeatedly deferred. Directing this play at Round House is an opportunity to honor the legacy of so many iconic yet unsung creators of American music, while inviting audiences into a conversation that remains urgently important today."

The cast is joined by a dynamic creative team that includes: Music Director **Cedric D. Lyles**, Scenic Designer **Arnel Sancianco**, Costume Designer **Samantha Jones**, Lighting Designer **Minjoo Kim**, Sound Designer **Kevin Lee Alexander**, Associate Sound Designer **Delaney Bray**, Wigs and Makeup Designer **LaShawn Melton**, Dramaturg **Naysan Mojgani**, Associate Director and Intimacy/Fight Director **Gregory Geffrard**, Associate Lighting Designer **Lily Tomasic**, Stage Manager **Che Wernsman**, Assistant Stage Manager **JuanCarlos Contreras**, and Production Assistants **Kennedi Hendrix** and **Peri Walker**.

"*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is one of the most important and enduring works in the American theatrical canon and Wilson's work has been central to Round House's artistic identity for decades, with acclaimed productions of *Two Trains Running*, *Gem of the Ocean*, and the autobiographical *How I Learned What I Learned*, as well as our 2023 production of *Radio Golf*," says **Ryan Rilette, Artistic Director of Round House Theatre**. "Opening Round House Theatre's 50th Anniversary Season with *Ma Rainey* celebrates five decades of bold storytelling, and we're thrilled to continue our collaboration with Olney Theatre Center, who have been such wonderful partners over the years."

"We are delighted to partner once again with Round House Theatre, building on a successful collaboration that began with our 2016 co-production of *Angels in America (Parts I and II)*, to create a theatrical event that will entertain, challenge, and inspire audiences throughout the region," says **Jason Loewith, Artistic Director of Olney Theatre Center**.

Tickets may be purchased by calling 240.644.1100 or ordering online at RoundHouseTheatre.org. Round House Theatre is located at 4545 East-West Highway, one block from Wisconsin Avenue and the Bethesda station on Metro's Red Line.

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ARTIST INFORMATION

August Wilson (Playwright) (April 27, 1945–October 2, 2005) authored *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*. These works explore the heritage and experience of African Americans, decade by decade, over the course of the 20th century. His plays have been produced at regional theaters across the country and all over the world, as well as on Broadway. In 2003, Mr. Wilson made his professional stage debut in his one-man show, *How I Learned What I Learned*. Mr. Wilson's works garnered many awards, including Pulitzer Prizes for *Fences* (1987) and for *The Piano Lesson* (1990); a Tony Award for *Fences*; Great Britain's Olivier Award for *Jitney*; and eight New York Drama Critics Circle Awards for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Fences*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Two Trains Running*, *Seven Guitars*, *Jitney*, and *Radio Golf*. Additionally, the cast recording of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* received a 1985 Grammy Award, and Mr. Wilson received a 1995 Emmy Award nomination for

his screenplay adaptation of *The Piano Lesson*. Mr. Wilson's early works included the one-act plays *The Janitor*, *Recycle*, *The Coldest Day of the Year*, *Malcolm X*, *The Homecoming*, and the musical satire *Black Bart and the Sacred Hills*. Mr. Wilson received many fellowships and awards, including Rockefeller and Guggenheim Fellowships in Playwrighting, the Whiting Writers Award, 2003 Heinz Award, was awarded a 1999 National Humanities Medal by the President of the United States, and received numerous honorary degrees from colleges and universities, as well as the only high school diploma ever issued by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. He was an alumnus of New Dramatists, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a 1995 inductee into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and on October 16, 2005, Broadway renamed the theater located at 245 West 52nd Street as the August Wilson Theatre. Additionally, Mr. Wilson was posthumously inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame in 2007. Mr. Wilson was born and raised in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and lived in Seattle, Washington at the time of his death. He is immediately survived by his two daughters, Sakina Ansari and Azula Carmen Wilson, and his wife, costume designer Constanza Romero.

Lili-Anne Brown (Director), a Chicago South Side native, works as a director, actor, and educator, and has performed in, directed, and produced many award-winning shows in Chicago and nationally. Recent directing credits include: *Carla Hall*; *Please Underestimate Me* (Olney Theatre Center); *The Wild Party* (New York City Center ENCORES!); *Fremont Ave* (world premiere, Arena Stage and South Coast Rep), *Eureka Day* (TimeLine Theatre); *Play On!* (Signature Theatre); *The Color Purple*, *The Nacirema Society...*, *School Girls*, and the world premieres of Ike Holter's *I Hate It Here* and *Lottery Day* (Goodman Theatre); *Two Trains Running* (The Acting Company, Nat'l Tour); *Dreamgirls* (McCarter Theater and Goodspeed Musicals); *FELA!* (Olney Theatre/Round House Theatre); *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (Huntington Theatre); and *Ain't No Mo'* (Woolly Mammoth and Baltimore CenterStage). She is the former Artistic Director of Bailiwick Chicago, where she focused programming on new play development with resident playwrights and Chicago-premiere musicals. She has received two Helen Hayes Awards, five Jeff Awards, two BTA awards, and one African American Arts Alliance Award for excellence in directing. Inaugural recipient of the Walder Foundation's Platform Award and a 2021 recipient of the 3Arts Award for Theatre. Member of SDC, AEA, SAG-AFTRA, and a graduate of Northwestern University.

CAST INFORMATION (alphabetical)

Ro Boddie (Toledo) is thrilled to be returning to Round House. Previous Round House credits include *Sally & Tom*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *The Mountaintop*, *Radio Golf*, *The Tempest*, *A Boy and His Soul*, and *"Master Harold" ...and the Boys*. DC credits include *The World to Come* at Woolly Mammoth; *The American Five* at Ford's Theatre; *Paradise Blue*, *Pipeline*, *Three Sisters*, *No Sisters*, and *Dirt* at Studio Theatre; *Comedy of Errors* at Shakespeare Theatre Company; *Tempestuous Elements* at Arena Stage; and *The Agitators* at Mosaic Theater Company. Off-Broadway credits include *Socrates* at The Public and *Seize The King* at Classical Theatre of Harlem. Select TV credits include *Godfather of Harlem*, *Run the World*, and *The Good Wife*. Ro is a proud alum of UNCSA. Co-founder of Imminent Theatre Company. @roboddieart

Zach Brewster-Geisz (Policeman) is excited to make his Round House debut. DC work includes: *The Outsider* (Helen Hayes nomination: Outstanding Lead Performer) and *The Minutes* at Keegan Theatre; *Indecent* and *The Chosen* at 1st Stage; *The Scenarios* and *If I Forget* at Studio Theatre; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Avant Bard; *Annie Jump and the Library of Heaven* at Rorschach Theatre; *East of Eden* and *Richard III* at NextStop Theatre; and *Grand Concourse* and *The Explorers Club* at Prologue Theatre. Television work includes *We Own This City* (HBO) and *Lady in the Lake* (Apple TV). He is on the faculty at the National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts. www.ZachBG.com

Yao Dogbe (Levee) is excited to be returning to Round House! Previous Round House credits include Booth in *Topdog/Underdog*, Gbenga in *Nollywood Dreams*, David/Val in *Ohio State Murders*, and Kwame in *Homebound*. DC credits include *The American Five* at Ford's Theatre; *Jaja's African Hair Braiding* at Arena Stage Company; and *King Lear* at Shakespeare Theatre Company. Off-Broadway and regional credits include *The Doctor* at Park Avenue Armory; *Nollywood Dreams* at MCC Theatre; *Richard III*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Macbeth* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater; *Fences* at American Players Theatre; *Cymbeline* at Utah Shakespeare Festival; *Intimate Apparel* at Northlight Theatre; and *Fly* at Capital Repertory Theatre. Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Lead Performer in a Play: *Topdog/Underdog*. TV/Film: *Dark Matter* (Apple TV). MFA: University of Houston, BA in Fine Arts: Norfolk State University. @yaonation

Chris Genebach (Sturdyvant) is ecstatic to return to Round House Theatre where he previously appeared in *The Seafarer* and *Ink*. DC/DMV area credits include several shows at Shakespeare Theatre Company, Folger Theatre, Olney Theatre Center, Signature Theatre, Woolly Mammoth, 1st Stage, Theatre Alliance, Mosaic Theatre, Studio Theatre, and Everyman Theatre. Chris's

Broadway and Off-Broadway credits include *Shining City* and *The Other Side* at Manhattan Theatre Club; and *Rose Rage: Henry VI, Parts 1 2 & 3* at The Duke on 42nd. His regional credits include *King Lear* at the Goodman and several shows at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, including the North American premiere of *Rose Rage: Henry VI Parts 1 2 & 3*. Chris received his BFA education at the Theatre School at DePaul University in Chicago.

Michael Glenn (Irvin) is honored to be returning to Round House Theatre for this co-production with Olney Theatre Center. His previous work with Round House includes *Rules for Living* (serving as Assistant Director), *What the Constitution Means to Me*, *The Seafarer*, *Ink* (another Olney co-production), *Gem of the Ocean*, *Small Mouth Sounds*, *Stage Kiss*, and *THIS*. Previous productions at Olney Theatre Center include *Tiger Style!*, *Marjorie Prime*, and *Neville's Island*. Other favorite past credits in the DMV area include *Red Velvet* with the Shakespeare Theatre Company, *Junk* at Arena Stage, *Jumpers for Goalposts* at Studio Theatre, *Brighton Beach Memoirs* at Theatre J, *Sense & Sensibility* at the Folger Shakespeare Library, *Clybourne Park* with Woolly Mammoth, and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* at Signature Theatre.

Nicole Michelle Haskins (Ma Rainey) is so excited to be making her Round House Theatre debut. Off-Broadway credits include *Cell* at Keen Company. Regional theatre credits include multiple productions of *The Color Purple* at Goodman Theatre (Jeff Award Nomination), *The Muny* (St. Louis Theatre Circle Winner), and *Drury Lane Theatre* (Jeff Award Winner); the U.S. premiere of *Hopelessly Devoted* at Piven Theatre; *Caroline, or Change* at Firebrand Theatre (Black Theatre Alliance Award Nomination); *Spitfire Grill* at Refuge Theatre Project (Jeff Award Nomination); *The Wiz* at Kokandy Productions (Black Theatre Alliance Award Nomination, Jeff Award Nomination, and *TimeOut Chicago* Theatre Award Nomination); *The Music Man*, *Father Comes Home from the Wars Parts 1, 2, & 3*, and *How to Catch Creation* at Goodman Theatre; and the world premiere of *HeLa* at Sideshow Theatre. Nicole is a former Steppenwolf Acting Fellow and MOSAIC Youth Theatre of Detroit alum.

Jaylen Henderson (Sylvester) is thrilled to be making his Round House Theatre debut! Recent DC-area credits include *Othello* in *Othello* at Port Tobacco Players; Dontrell Jones III in *Dontrell, who Kissed the Sea* at Sisters Freehold; and *Arcadia* and *The Brothers Size* at The Theatre Lab. Jaylen is a graduate of The Theatre Lab Honors Acting Conservatory.

Derrick Truby (Slow-Drag) has appeared locally in *1776* (Benjamin Franklin), *Sister Act* (Curtis), *Little Shop of Horrors* (Seymour), *A Christmas Carol* (Fezziwig) at Ford's Theatre; *Play On!*

(Sweets) at Signature Theatre; *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Simple) at Folger Theatre; *A.D. 16* (Ensemble) at Olney Theatre Center; *Elephant and Piggie's We Are in a Play!* (Elephant) and *Winnie the Pooh* (Pooh) at Adventure Theatre Company; *Be More Chill* at Monumental Theatre Company; *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* at Imagination Stage; and *Smokey Joe's Café* and *Memphis* (Bobby) at ArtsCentric, where he is a Company Member. Regional credits include *Godspell* (Jesus) at Great Lakes Center for the Arts.

Craig Wallace (Cutler) returns to Round House after being seen in August Wilson's *Radio Golf*, *Ink*, *Stage Kiss*, "*Master Harold*" ... *and the Boys*, *Little Prince*, *Table Top*, *Permanent Collection*, and *The Misanthrope*. Other DC area credits include numerous productions at Shakespeare Theatre Company, Ford's Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, Studio Theatre, and Arena Stage. Regional credits include Berkeley Rep, Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, Actor's Theatre of Louisville, and Shakespeare Santa Cruz. MFA: Pennsylvania State University and Royal National Theatre, London; BFA: Howard University.

Kanysha Williams (Dussie Mae) is so excited to be returning to Round House! Previous Round House credits include *The Tempest* and *FELA!* DC area credits include *Sister Act*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *1776* at Ford's Theatre; *Play On*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, and *Gun and Powder* at Signature Theatre; and *Macbeth In Stride* at Shakespeare Theatre Company. Regional credits include *The Color Purple* at Riverside Center and *Sister Act* at Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre. Kanysha is the co-host of the podcast *Downstage Center*, and a recording artist under the name KANYSHA. Her original music is now available on all streaming platforms. Education: The Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Washington National Opera Institute, The San Francisco Conservatory of Music, George Mason University. Instagram: @StrawberrySings. TikTok and YouTube: @StrawberrySingsMusic.

UNDERSTUDIES (alphabetical)

Dominique Gray (Levee/Sylvester)

DeJeanette Horne (Cutler/Toledo)

Tre'mon Mills (Slow Drag)

Brendan Murray (Sturdyvant/Policeman)

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

ABOUT THE PLAY: Set in 1920s Chicago and pulsing with rousing blues music, wry comedy, and poetic insight, August Wilson's acclaimed play follows trailblazing singer Ma Rainey and her band during a fraught recording session. As conflicts flare over art, power, and control, the struggle between the musicians and studio executives grows to a shattering finale. Don't miss this explosive and thrilling "genuine American masterpiece" (*Chicago Reader*) that takes a searing look at the racial exploitation at the heart of the music industry and celebrates the cathartic power of the blues.

WHERE: Round House Theatre, 4545 East-West Highway in Bethesda (one block from Wisconsin Ave. and Metro's Bethesda station). For directions, parking, and public transportation info, visit RoundHouseTheatre.org/Visit-Us/.

DATES AND TIMES: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* runs from September 9 - October 11, 2026. Performances are Tuesday through Thursday at 7:30pm, Friday and Saturday at 8pm, and Saturday and Sunday at 2pm.

A special **Black Out Performance** will be held on October 6 at 7:30pm.

ACCESSIBLE PERFORMANCES:

- **Mask-required:** Oct 10 (matinee)
- **Audio-described:** Sep 19 (matinee)
- **Open-captioned:** Sep 20 (matinee), Sep 26 (matinee)

PRE- & POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS:

- **Director Discussion:** Sep 11 at 6:45pm
- **Designer Discussion:** Sep 9 at 6:45pm
- **Post-Show Discussions:** Sep 9, 10, 20

TICKETS: Tickets can be purchased by calling 240.644.1100, ordering online at RoundHouseTheatre.org, or visiting the box office. Available ticket discounts include:

- **Free Play** (free tickets for students ages 13 through college): Round House Theatre's Free Play initiative ties into our greater strategy to develop theatre audiences of tomorrow by providing rich, meaningful arts experiences today. For more information, visit RoundHouseTheatre.org/FreePlay or email Education@RoundHouseTheatre.org.

- **On the House** (community ticket access program): Round House's next step to remove barriers that can make it difficult for some members of our community to experience our work is On the House, which provides complimentary group tickets to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and community-serving organizations with a 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor. For more information, visit www.roundhousetheatre.org/on-stage/on-the-house/ or email Community@RoundHouseTheatre.org
- **Pay-What-You-Can performances:** PWYC tickets go on sale online or by phone only (no walk-up sales) beginning one week before the first performance of each show. The patron decides the admission price. Limit two tickets per order. PWYC tickets are available for performances on September 9 (7:30pm) and 12 (2pm) and are subject to availability.
- **Blue Star Theatre Program:** Active-duty military personnel, veterans, and their immediate family qualify for a \$10 discount off the single ticket price. Learn more at RoundHouseTheatre.org/On-Stage/Tickets.
- **2-For-1 Tuesdays:** For all Tuesday performances of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, all seats are buy one, get one free. 2-for-1 Tuesday tickets are available online or by phone (240.644.1100) with promo code TWOFORONE. Discounts may not be combined. Not valid on previously purchased tickets.
- **Group Sales:** Groups of 10 or more can save 10% off the single ticket price and are exempt from single ticket fees. These tickets must be reserved and purchased in advance by calling 240.644.1100 or emailing GroupSales@RoundHouseTheatre.org.

ABOUT ROUND HOUSE THEATRE

Round House Theatre is one of the leading professional theatres in the Washington, D.C. area, producing a season of new plays, modern classics, and musicals for more than 50,000 patrons each year at our theatre in Bethesda. Round House has been nominated for 253 Helen Hayes Awards and has won 60, 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 ages 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 and youth

Round House Theatre's Golden Anniversary sponsors are Nan C. Beckley; Mitch and Heidi Dupler; Gil and Rona Eisner; Jay and Robin Hammer; and Manfred M Hein* and Florence H Hein*.*

**in memoriam*

ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER

Founded in 1938 as a summer playhouse, Olney Theatre Center now produces world and American premieres of plays and musicals, and reimaginings of familiar titles year-round; presents the work of leading companies and artists; tours nationally and locally; teaches students of all ages; and mentors a more inclusive generation of theatre makers. For more than 8 decades, Olney Theatre Center has brought impactful theater performance and education to our community, helping to grow the vibrancy and vitality of our home in the Washington, DC region.

Over the years, some of the biggest names in theater and film have appeared on our stages, from Tallulah Bankhead and Helen Hayes to Uzo Aduba, Alan Cumming, and Robin de Jesus. Olney Theatre is now the cultural anchor of a rapidly changing region and serves one of the most diverse, best educated, and wealthiest counties in the country. Situated on the unceded land of the Piscataway-Conoy people, the Olney area was once a rural farming community with a unique Quaker heritage. Now the area is occupied by every kind of family that makes up 21st century America, along with major corporations, shopping districts, civic associations, non-profit organizations, and a diverse collection of houses of worship. Montgomery County's one million residents play a dynamic role in the Baltimore-Washington corridor and are a driving force behind the region's creative economy.

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