



Melting Pot announces strong 19-20 line-up

Press release posted by Bob Evans

"GREATEST HITS" of African American Theater Season

Kansas City Melting Pot Theatre's (KCMPT) 2019-20 lineup features some of the greatest names in African American theater: August Wilson, Lorraine Hansberry, and Ntozake Shange, and newcomer Lewis J. Morrow.

"We wanted to give our audiences a "Greatest Hits" of African American theater," newly announced Artistic Director Nicole Hodges Persley said. "Through familiar tales told from an African American perspective, I hope that audiences will begin to rethink notions of the universal as they reflect on the social, cultural and structural barriers that often stand between diverse communities and the American dream."

Audiences will find these plays timely as each selection commemorates the lives of some of America's greatest Black playwrights who are no longer with us on significant anniversaries of their works while introducing audiences to an emerging voice reminiscent of early August Wilson, Kansas City playwright Lewis J. Morrow.

Founder and Executive Director Harvey Williams opens the season with a production of August Wilson's "King Hedley II," the 9th play in Wilson's now classic ten-play Pittsburgh cycle. "King Hedley II" takes place in the mid-1980s in the Reagan era and follows the life of an ex-con who has to find a

way to make a living after the trauma of prison.

“King Hedley II” premiered in 1999 at the Pittsburgh Public Theater. The show’s placement marks the 20th anniversary of the play.

The second play in the greatest hits lineup is Ntozake Shange’s “For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide /When the Rainbow Is Enuf,” directed by Lynn King. Forty-four years after its premiere in 1976, the landmark “choreopoem” addresses Black feminist perspectives that all women can relate to today. Written in the largely non-inclusive feminist landscape of the 1970s, this play’s inspirational messages of female empowerment draws a whole new generation of enthusiasts. The production will commemorate the first anniversary of Ntozake Shange’s passing on October 27, 2018.

Nicole Hodges Persley follows that with her production of Lorraine Hansberry’s “A Raisin in the Sun.” This timely selection celebrates the 60th anniversary of Hansberry’s’ 1959 production on Broadway that was directed by Lloyd Richards.

“We felt we could honor Hansberry on her 60th anniversary with an intimate production that speaks to Hansberry’s prescience about topics in our current moment such as structural racism, feminism, revolutionary politics, and black families,” Hodges Persley said. “I want audiences to see this story anew from an ensemble perspective.

“So often, productions focus on Walter’s plight or Lena Younger’s dilemma. Hansberry wrote the play as a true ensemble to speak directly to a family in mourning looking for seeds of inspiration to carry on to realize their unique dreams.”

The season closes with Lewis J. Morrow’s “Baybra’s Tulips.” Morrow’s sense of language and story remixes influences from Wilson, Hansberry, and Shange in this emotional tale of a dysfunctional black family who must decide the limits of

familial love. Baybra is a young, thirty-something Black man recently released from prison who must decide the right path to take when secrets of violence lead to passionate pleas for acceptance and forgiveness.

“The inspiration for ‘Baybra’s Tulips’ is based on my personal experiences as well as observations of other family dynamics,” Morrow said. “I never imagined this play would get produced in a season thematic of ‘greatest hits.’ I’m humbled and grateful, beyond words to reflect KC Melting Pot’s vision of what the future of black theatre may look like.”

True to its mission, KCMPT continues to ask important questions about where American Theater is going by challenging the American Theater narrative with powerful and thought-provoking productions written from diverse perspectives.