



# **MET continues August Wilson series with 'Seven Guitars'**

Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre



August Wilson's "Seven Guitars" continues his series of plays set in the Pittsburgh area as he again focuses on the everyday struggles of a poor group of friends who struggle to eek out an existence in an unfriendly America.

"Seven Guitars" opened Feb. 21 and plays at the Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre through March 10. Check the MET website for specific performance dates, times, tickets, and more information.

Wilson's masterful dialogue expresses a perspective from a group so seldom heard in American theatre. His words and the dialogue cut to the core of the characters and unravel the suffering of their past, the desperation of the present, and their dreams to grab a piece of the American Dream for themselves. His characters provide an in-depth look at their

particular reality while still unifying the characters and providing a strong foundation for the story they tell.

“Wilson weaves the stories of seven African-Americans living off what they can in the row-houses of Pittsburgh,” a MET spokesman said. Floyd, a down on his luck thirty-something, returns home after a 90-day incarceration and learns that a song he recorded almost a year ago has become a hit record. Because of the song’s popularity, Floyd received a letter from the record company to return and record more songs in hopes of building his career.



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Floyd’s former girlfriend, Vera, and his neighbors warn him that success also attracts failures and that seeking fortune and fame come after a personal investment and, like everything in life, come at a cost. The underlying message from Wilson’s piece lies in the Biblical text: “The love of money is the root of all evil.” Choices and chances Floyd makes can lead to desperate consequences. In “Seven Guitars” Wilson’s anti-hero’s efforts to find his American Dream face unforeseen roadblocks and consequences.

MET productions always feature a strong cast comprised mostly of local talent, and “Seven Guitars” continues that trend. Karen Paisley selected a cast that finds the heart of Wilson’s words and when put on a beautifully designed set, magic happens. Throw in some background pre-show Blues to set the

tone and enjoy the journey.

Keenan Ramos, relatively new to the KC theatre scene stars as Floyd and absolutely demands focus in all of his scenes. His delivery of lines, his body language, his movements and pace give him the dominance his character needs to explain his past failures, current needs, and passion to force a future success. His hunger for better is the heart and driving force of the story.



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Playing the part of a Caribbean immigrant, Granville O'Neal gives a chilling performance of a mentally challenged black man who has come to distrust all whites. He works all day selling cigarettes and chicken sandwiches even though he shows the signs of Tuberculosis. O'Neal's character suffers the most obvious turmoil and his character provides the contrast between competency and madness. His portrayal will shock the audience.

Finally given a part with depth, Shawna Pena-Downing, demonstrates that she's qualified to stand among the most talented actresses in the metro. Pena-Downing takes chances with the character of Vera and develops a character with a richness, fullness, and texture of both iron and velvet. She gives Vera a character who sees the past and future with clarity, yet her heart almost betrays her. Scenes in Act I with Ramos will rivet the audience.

While there is comedy within the drama, it's mostly subtleties in the character delivery, attitude, and expressions of the actors bringing life and heart into their characters. In "Seven Guitars" Robert 'Tre' Coppage can steal any scene with his character's expressions, line delivery, body language, and reaction to the lines spoken by others. He makes his character likeable, funny, yet complex. Sherri Roulette Mosley always delivers the goods and does so by adding a sense of spunk to the all-to-wise Louise. Simple intonations, nods of the head at appropriate times makes Louise a character everyone knows and respects. She shows tenderness for the ill Hadley and a voice of reason for Vera. Her character helps bridge the story and add cohesiveness. Theodore Priest Holmes provides a taste of reality against Floyd's dreams. He brings some hometown conflict with a possible attraction to Vera and foreshadows the obstacles Floyd faces. And, a fresh face to KC, Alexis Dupree, adds the Tabasco sauce to the setting as a young visitor with a tough exterior but a tender heart. Her motives remain questionable, but her character provides the lift the story needs.



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According to the MET, "Seven Guitars" is the 1940's submission of Wilson's massive Pittsburgh Cycle, a series of plays from the Oscar nominated and Pulitzer & Tony winning playwright that focuses on the plights, progressions, and successes of African-Americans in the 20th century. Wilson wrote this installment in 1995 and the play premiered on Broadway that following year to wide critical acclaim and numerous Tony

nominations. The drama was also considered for the Pulitzer Prize submission.”

The ensemble is led by MET mainstays Sherri Roulette Mosley, Theodore Priest Holmes, Shawna Pena-Downing, Granville O’Neal, Robert ‘Tre’ Coppage and features MET debut performances from Keenan Ramos and Alexis Dupree.

The production team is: Ryan Fortney, stage manager; Karen Paisley, set design; James Paisley, stage manager; Onetta Johnson, Wardrobe mistress; Karen Paisley and James Paisley, lighting design; Marc Manley and Ryan Fortney, props; Maxwell Frederickson, sound design; Susan Proctor, costume design. The crew is: Karen Paisley, Alex Paxton, Todd Lanker, Barrie Smith, Susan Proctor, James Paisley, Bob Cheney, Dave Rapp.

The MET’s production of “Seven Guitars” is believed to be the first professional production of this piece in the KC Metro, according to Paisley. This new classic opens Thursday, February 21 and runs through Sunday, March 10. Evening performances begin nightly at 7:30p.m. and at 2p.m. for Sunday matinees. The plays are produced at the MET’s newly acquired venue – the historical Warwick Theatre. The Warwick is at 3927 Main St., KCMO 64111, and there’s plenty of parking behind the building. Tickets can be ordered online at the [MET website](#), over the phone by calling the box office at (816) 569-3226. More detailed information about the MET and current and upcoming productions are posted on the website.

Tags: Metropolitan Ensemble Theatre, “Seven Guitars” review, Kansas City Theatre, Kansas City Performing Arts, Kansas City Arts & Entertainment