

SAINTS & POETS THEATER



The European Premiere of
August Wilson's
How I Learned
What I Learned

Co-Conceived with Todd Kreidler
Starring Lester Purry as August Wilson



America's preeminent African American
playwright -- Jitney, Fences and Ma
Rainey's Black Bottom-- in his own words.



Produced by Special Arrangement with The Estate of August Wilson and Samuel French, Inc., A Concord Theatricals Company

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Directors Notes:

Welcome! This production marks the consummation of a five year dream. It's been a long and jagged road getting here, with the global pandemic being only one of the many stones in our passway. But, to expound on an observation Mr. Wilson notes in this play, the detour sometimes proves to be a more rewarding path than the road closed for repairs. In our darkest days friends old and new have unflinchingly gone above and beyond our wildest expectations. Xela Batchelder, you have blessed us with your invaluable experience and guidance. Lester Purry, we could not have asked for a better collaborator for his project, especially on such short notice. We are both honored and humbled by the faith shown by The Estate of August Wilson in entrusting us with this European premiere. Our wish for you, the audience, is to enjoy the same good fortune in the end as we have enjoyed along this journey.

- Mark Whitehead, 2 August, 2022

August Wilson's How I Learned What I Learned
is supported by the kind generosity of our donors:

Michael J. Ramsay, M.D.
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Special Thanks: The Estate of August Wilson, Todd Kreidler, Janis Burley Wilson, David Atkins, The August Wilson African American Cultural Center, Tracey D. Turner, Bryant Bentley, Jack Erdie, Edwin Lee Gibson, Monteze Freeland, Mark Clayton Southers, Pittsburgh Playwrights Theater, Andrew Paul, Kinetic Theatre

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Saints & Poets Theater

and

Rocket Productions

Present

August Wilson's
How I Learned
What I Learned

Co-Conceived with
Todd Kreidler

Starring Lester Purry as The Actor

Produced and Directed by Mark Whitehead

Co-Producer: Xela Batchelder

Rehearsal Stage Manager: Moriah Turner

Scenic Consultant: M. K. Hughes

Costume Design: Cheryl El Walker

Sound and Media Design: Mark Whitehead

Lighting Design: Cal Dunbar

Setting: The crucible in which
many a work of art has been fired

About the Cast and Crew:

Lester Purry is an acclaimed Wilsonian actor and a long time company member with Penumbra Theatre, the St. Paul, Minnesota company that helped launch playwright August Wilson's career. At Penumbra Mr. Purry has played the roles of Cory in Fences, Hambone in Two Trains Running, Hedley in King Hedley II, Booster in Jitney, and Lymon in The Piano Lesson - the production Mr. Wilson said was the best he'd ever seen. Mr. Purry performed at Philadelphia Theatre Company as Floyd Barton in Seven Guitars, Arizona Theatre Company as Wolf in Two Trains Running, and as Troy Maxson in Fences at Portland Playhouse, Palm Beach Dramaworks and Los Angeles Performing Arts Center. At The Guthrie Theatre he performed in a national tour as Othello, and as Augustus Newcastle in The Darker Face of the Earth and Lester Mason in The Big White Fog. At Baltimore Center Stage he was Marvell Thunder in Thunder Knocking on the Door, as well as King of the Hill in You Can Stop On a Dime. He played Scarus in Antony and Cleopatra, Mordred in Camelot, and reprised his role as Lymon in The Piano Lesson at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. He also played the role of Aslan in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe at Children's Theatre Company, Most recently he performed the role of Charles Grace in Fireflies at South Coast Repertory Theatre. Lester also captivated audiences in the one man show Thurgood as Thurgood Marshall at Portland Playhouse and to consistently sold out houses at Geva Theatre Center, both directed by Penumbra founder Lou Bellamy.

Mark Whitehead (Producer/Director/Sound and Media Designer) is the founder of Saints & Poets Theater, for which he produced and directed the world premiere of Christiane D's Saffronia, and the Pittsburgh premieres of Sam Shepard's The Late Henry Moss and Donald Freed's Secret Honor: The Last Testament of Richard M. Nixon. He was a member of timespace, for which he produced hamletmachine, and directed 4-H Club and Insignificance. Additional directing credits include Comfort Zone and The Revenants for Pittsburgh Playwrights Theater (PPTCO), Cry Havoc, Taking Sides, True West and Fool for Love. Mark is Resident Sound Designer for PPTCO, a post he has also held for The Unseam'd

Shakespeare Company and The Jewish Theater of Pittsburgh, and has designed for Short North Stage in Columbus, OH, The Ensemble Theatre in Houston, TX, The St. Louis Black Repertory, and numerous Pittsburgh theaters. Mark's sound was heard internationally in PPTCO's production of Miss Julie, Clarissa and John at the 2017 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Mark has won AACTA/Onyx awards for best sound design three years in a row for his work on PPTCO's annual August Wilson productions. He was named best sound designer and listed among the best directors in Pittsburgh City Paper's 2001 theater roundup, and was named best sound designer of 2000 by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Mark was a founding producer of The Dark Night Cabaret performance series and has produced and directed music videos for several Pittsburgh bands.

Moriah Turner (Rehearsal Stage Manager) is an 11th grader at the Barack Obama Academy of International Studies who has spent much of her youth backstage and in rehearsal rooms. She served as the stage manager for The Twelve Dates of Christmas and production intern for Macbeth with Steel City Shakespeare Center in Pittsburgh. She is also an avid guitar player and visual artist with work currently featured at the Carnegie Museum of Art.

M.K. Hughes Scenic Designer M.K. is a graduate of Southern Illinois University with a MFA in Scenic Design for the Theater. She is currently a visiting artist in scenic properties and design at the University of Pittsburgh. For the past 7 years she has been working as a freelance scenic designer, props artisan, and scenic painter at various locations, including: Point Park University in Pittsburgh (Design), Prime Stage in Pittsburgh (Props & Design), The New Hazlett Center for Performing Art in Pittsburgh (Design), the Alabama and Oregon Shakespeare Festivals (Painting), McLeod Summer Playhouse in Carbondale, IL (Props & Design), and Kansas State University (Design). www.mkhughesdesign.com

Cheryl El-Walker (Costume Design), a Pittsburgh native, is a veteran stage actor and director, as well as an award-winning

costume designer and make-up artist. Her work has been seen in all ten of August Wilson's plays, completing the American Century Cycle with King Hedley II. Her talents have received seven Onyx Awards from the African American Council of the Arts, a Best Director award from the Theatre Festival in Black and White, and the Legacy Award from Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre Company. She has portrayed Charlesetta in East Texas Hot Links, and is currently reprising her role as Virginia in Savior Samuel at the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, NC.

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 the descendants of Africans in North America, decade-by-decade, over the course of the twentieth century, forming the complication entitled *The American Century Cycle*. His plays have been produced on Broadway, at regional theaters across the USA, and all over the world. 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*; as well as seven 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*, and *Jitney*. 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 the Rockefeller and Guggenheim Fellowships in Playwriting, the Whiting Writers Award, 2003 Heinz Award, was awarded a 1999 National Humanities Medal by President Bill Clinton, 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 - The August Wilson Theatre. Additionally, Mr. Wilson was posthumously inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame in 2017. 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, who is the executor of his estate.

Todd Kreidler (Co-Conceiver) worked with August Wilson on Broadway and in regional theaters across the country, developing the final three plays in Wilson's famed American Century Cycle. Together they conceived How I Learned What I Learned, an autobiographical solo show that Wilson originally performed and Todd directed. Reimagined for an actor to perform, Todd directed the Off-Broadway premiere at Signature Theatre and subsequent productions at True Colors Theatre, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, Huntington Theatre and the Round House Theatre. Todd also adapted the iconic film Guess Who's Coming to Dinner into a widely produced stage play that has enjoyed several successful runs at regional theaters such as Arena Stage, Huntington Theatre, St. Louis Rep, Asolo Rep, Indiana Rep and Geva Theatre. Currently, Todd is writing a musical with Mötley Crüe bassist Nikki Sixx, based on Sixx's music and best-selling memoir, The Heroin Diaries, directed by David Esbjornson. On Broadway, Todd worked with director Kenny Leon and producers Eric Gold and Afeni Shakur to develop a musical fable based on the lyrics of Tupac Shakur entitled Holler If Ya Hear Me, starring Saul Williams and Christopher Jackson. Additionally on Broadway, Todd was the dramaturg on August Wilson's Radio Golf and Gem Of The Ocean as well as Associate Director of the Tony Award winning revival of Fences starring Denzel Washington and Viola Davis. Todd has enjoyed numerous collaborations with Tony Award winning director Kenny Leon, including serving as Associate Artistic Director of August Wilson's 20th Century Festival at the Kennedy Center, where Todd directed Joe Turner's Come And Gone. Todd also worked for five seasons as Associate Artistic Director of Leon's

True Colors Theatre Company in Atlanta, where he directed plays and co-founded the August Wilson Monologue Competition--a national educational outreach program aimed at integrating August Wilson's work into high school curriculum. Now in its 11th year, the AWMC serves students in 12 participating cities: Atlanta, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Dallas, Greensboro, Los Angeles, New Haven, New York, Pittsburgh, Portland and Seattle. Each city provides an array of year-round enrichment opportunities focused on Wilson's work that lead up to a regional competition event. The finalists from each city then compete nationally over a weekend in New York City, which includes attending shows and workshops led by renowned artists, culminating in an evening of students from around the country performing on the stage of the August Wilson Theatre on Broadway. Todd currently lives in the Chicago area where he and his wife, Erin Annarella, raise their 5-year-old son, Evan August.

Mission Statement:

"Saints & Poets Theater is a performing arts company which seeks to present challenging and rarely-performed works that integrate the work and ideas of artists from diverse backgrounds and various media, to find unique ways of exploring and illuminating the human condition."

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Saints & Poets Theater is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

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Emily:

Oh, Earth, you're too wonderful for anyone to realize you! Do any
human beings ever realize life while they live it - every, every
minute?

Stage Manager:

No - Saints and poets maybe - they do some...
- Thornton Wilder, Our Town, Act III