

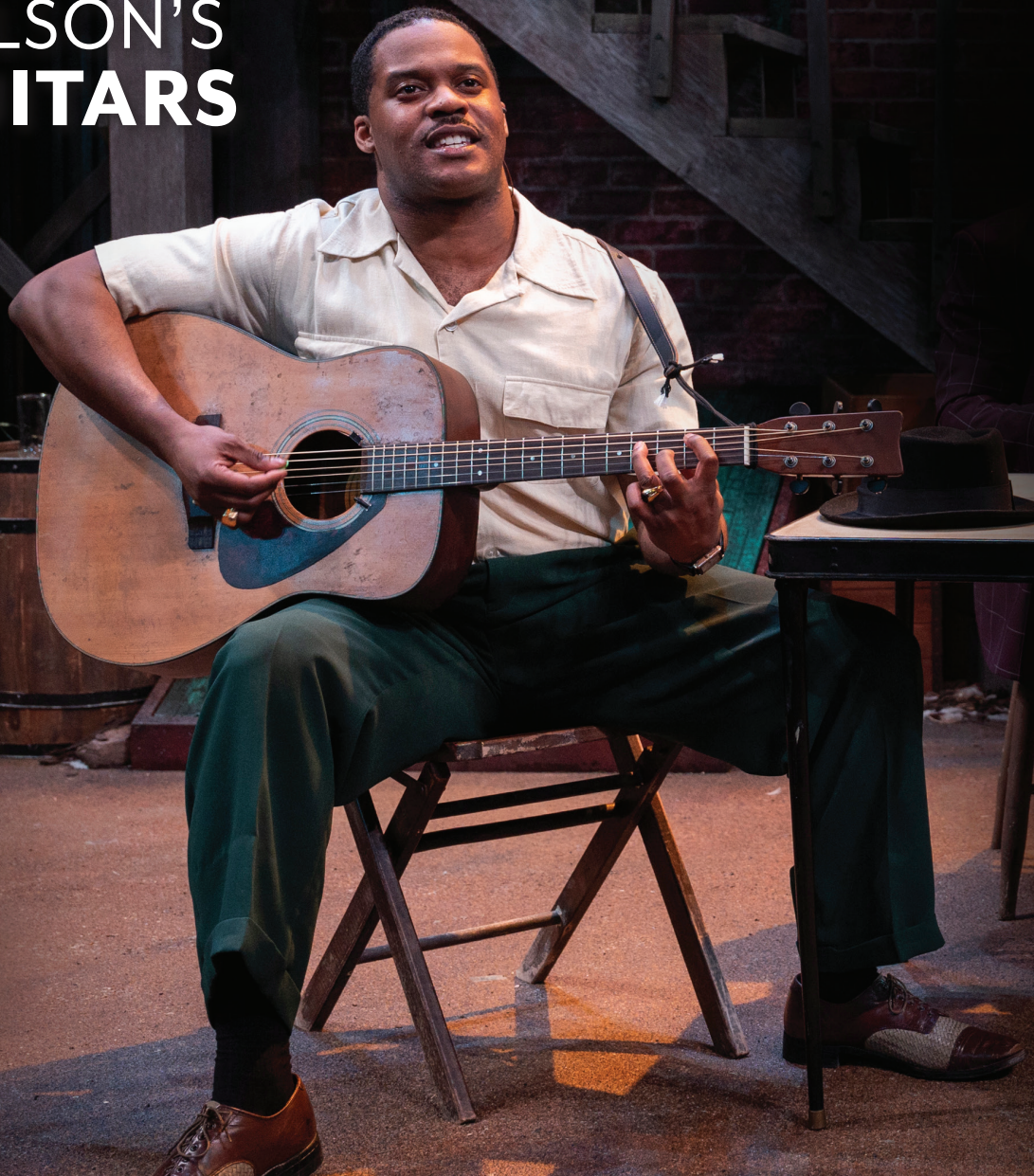
PROLOGUE

APRIL 2023

The Carol Ann and
Ralph V. Haile, Jr. Foundation presents

AUGUST WILSON'S SEVEN GUITARS

With live blues and
lyrical dialogue,
August Wilson's Tony
Award-winning play
promises a soulful
exploration of the
ties that bind and the
chords that hold us
together.



ALSO INSIDE: VIEW PHOTOS FROM THE GRAND OPENING OF THE MAINSTAGE THEATRE COMPLEX

SCENE BY SCENE

VOLUME 51, ISSUE 3

- 2 GRAND OPENING EVENTS**
Photos from the grand opening of the Mainstage Theatre Complex, featuring Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre.
- 4 AUGUST WILSON'S SEVEN GUITARS**
August Wilson's poignant, Tony Award-winning play with live blues music.
- 6 LEADING LADIES**
Celebrating 10 years of events, engagement and fundraising for theatre-loving women.
- 7 COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND EVENTS**
Details about the Playhouse's Arts and Culture Incubator and Off the Hill's *Nate the Great, The Musical*.
- 8 THE DELISH DISH CATERING & EVENTS**
Introducing the Playhouse's new casual fare dining caterer.

ABOUT PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE is the pre-show publication of Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. It is published as a service to Playhouse season subscribers, donors and others.

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2022-23 Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre Season presented by



2022-23 Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre Season presented by
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A GRAND CELEBRATION INDEED!



The Mainstage Theatre Complex, featuring Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre, is officially open! The Playhouse celebrated the completion of our capital campaign on March 13 with a ribbon cutting for our new, state-of-the-art facility and mainstage. The \$50 million project began construction in 2021. By the time of the ribbon cutting, we exceeded our fundraising goal by more than a million dollars.



"Thank you to all the donors that gave generously and made this amazing achievement possible," Robert Reifsnnyder, who co-chaired the capital campaign with Woody Taft, noted in his remarks to the city and state leaders and donors in attendance. "We exceeded our fundraising goal by just over \$1.3 million for a grand total of \$51,230,174 in funds available to build this new facility and usher in a new era for the Playhouse."

After the ribbon cutting, grand opening events continued throughout the week allowing members of the far-reaching Playhouse community to celebrate this momentous achievement. A grand opening gala on March 13 honored major donors to the capital campaign, and included a special performance by Broadway legend and original *A Chorus Line* performer Donna McKechnie. The program featured a video with heartfelt insights and sentiments shared by lead donors and longtime Playhouse supporters Moe and Jack Rouse, Richard Rosenthal, Jennie Rosenthal and Digi and Mike Schueler. The Rouse Theatre and Schueler Lobby officially opened in spectacular fashion on March 16 with an all-new production of *A Chorus Line*. An exciting post-show reception followed the sold-out performance and included festive decor, music, dancing, specially catered food and toasts all around.

Says Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison, "Thanks to the support of our community, we emerge from a tumultuous period with renewed clarity in our role as Cincinnati's national theatre — committed to bringing diverse, engaging works of great artistry to our community and putting Cincinnati's artistic excellence in the national spotlight."

GRAND OPENING EVENTS



Jack Rouse, Managing Director Abby Marcus, Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison, Moe Rouse and Board Chair Ellen van der Horst at the ribbon cutting with staff and Board members.



Moe and Jack Rouse.



Mayor Aftab Pureval with Blake Robison at the ribbon cutting with other city and state officials.



Blake Robison welcomes the audience to opening night.



The Elder High School Marching Band at the opening night of *A Chorus Line*.



The cast and creative team of *A Chorus Line* at the opening night cast party.



Kitty, Richard and Jennie Rosenthal.



Blake Robison and Board President Digi Schueler.



The Schueler Lobby on opening night.



Cast members of *A Chorus Line* pose in the photo booth at the cast party.

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Photos on pages 2 and 3 by Mikki Schaffner.

The Carol Ann and
Ralph V. Haile, Jr. Foundation presents

AUGUST WILSON'S SEVEN GUITARS

Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre
APRIL 23 - MAY 14, 2023

Cover and production photos on pages 4 and 5 by Michael Brosilow of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater production of August Wilson's *Seven Guitars*. Cover and page 4 photo of Dimonte Henning.

A STORY AS SOULFUL AS ITS MUSIC

By Tatiana Godfrey

Spoiler alert: Floyd "Schoolboy" Barton was dead to begin with. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come from the story of August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* — a stirring and poignant composition about the ties that bind, featuring live music and poetic monologues.

Wilson's landmark play takes place in the summer of 1948 in Pittsburgh, where blues music echoes throughout the neighborhood. Floyd had been a gifted guitarist whose star was on the rise, and his untimely death has irrevocably changed the tight-knit group of family and friends that surrounded him. At the beginning of the play, the characters have just returned from Floyd's funeral. By the second scene, we've gone back a week in time, seeing the events that led to the bluesman's untimely demise.

Lyrical language, earnest characters and a skillful infusion of the blues reveal the true wonder of *Seven Guitars*. Audiences might recognize these elements, characteristic of Wilson and his body of work, from the Playhouse's productions of *Two Trains Running* in 2019, *Jitney* in 2016 or even *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* in 1988. These, in addition to six other works that explore the Black American experience throughout the 20th century, comprise Wilson's groundbreaking American Century Cycle.

Like nine of the 10 plays in the Cycle, *Seven Guitars* takes place in Pittsburgh's Hill District. The setting was familiar to Wilson: His mother raised him, his two brothers and his three sisters in a two-bedroom house in the historically Black, culturally rich neighborhood. His mother instilled in Wilson a love for reading and writing, which led him first into the world of poetry. He dropped out of school at age 16 and immersed himself in the culture of the neighborhood, reciting his poetry at local cafes and jazz clubs.

The Hill District of Wilson's youth is very much alive in *Seven Guitars*. Wilson comments on this in his notes on the play: "I happen to think that the content of my mother's life — her myths, her superstitions, her prayers, the contents of her pantry, the smell of her kitchen, the song that escaped from her sometimes



parched lips, her thoughtful repose and pregnant laughter — are all worthy of art. Hence, *Seven Guitars*."

The world of the play, part fictional and part memory, is both inhabited and embodied by its cast of Black characters. Their small talk, gossiping, griping, existential musings, singing, dancing and card playing reveal the particulars and peculiarities of this world, bringing to life a space and a period of time that are deeply personal and memorable.

While many of Wilson's plays feature the death of a character, the world of *Seven Guitars* exists especially within the tension between life and death. Floyd's funeral looms over the entire play, highlighting the importance of the day-to-day moments that lead up to his death. Living and dying aren't far from anyone's mind; as the character Hedley observes, "Everybody got a time coming. Nobody can't say that they don't have a time coming. My father have his time. And his father have his time. Hedley is 59 years old. His time come soon enough. I'm not worried about that."

Considered one of the greatest American playwrights (if not the greatest), Wilson and his Tony Award- and Pulitzer Prize-winning body of work have opened doors to innumerable revelations and conversations about the Black experience in the U.S. What does *Seven Guitars* reveal about Black life? What does it reveal about America? His chronicling and contributions to Black culture have reached across generations, races and national boundaries, inviting readers and audiences across the globe to examine at ground level the despair generated by poverty and racism, while simultaneously celebrating Black America.

Experience *Seven Guitars* in Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre beginning April 23.

RETURN TO THE WORK OF AUGUST WILSON

By Tatiana Godfrey

Director Ron OJ Parson, an expert on August Wilson's body of work, gives insight about *Seven Guitars*.



Ron OJ Parson

How does *Seven Guitars* compare to some of Wilson's other plays? How is it unique?

Well, with *Seven Guitars*, August deviates somewhat from his usual format and gives us a little twist on structure by using a flashback to help us follow the lives of these seven characters (seven guitars, so to speak), a bit of tragedian structure. But for the most part we have similar themes of the battle to survive and make it in this world, through hardship and obstacles before us. Like always, August's characters are rich and complicated.

For me, I like to delve into the spirituality of the world of the play, and the love that exists in that world. I do believe with *Seven Guitars*, August deals a lot with that love and the spiritual meaning of many of the symbols in the play. Like all the plays, music is important, but *Seven Guitars*, like *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, is about a musician. I like to take that aspect to another level in the way I direct them. Being into blues and jazz myself, I use that to the fullest extent. Music is so important in the culture and world of the play.

In a preface to the play, Wilson writes about the worlds of his plays being informed by history but are ultimately fictional. Can you describe the world he (and you, through this production) are creating?

I would just say that they aren't trying to be history lessons for accuracy, as far as dates and times, etc. But the periods and feelings of us as a people are accurate. Things and feelings that existed in the community or world of the plays in those particular decades are real. Unfortunately, the protracted struggle was ongoing through all the decades and even the subsequent decades as well. So, yes, some of the historical accuracy may be somewhat skewed, but the accuracy of a people striving to deal with the world is evident in all the decades. That accuracy is evident.

You've directed around 30 different productions of Wilson plays. Can you tell us a little bit about what your process looks like when you direct a Wilson play?

Well, for me, it is imperative to bring August in the room with us. By that, I mean recognizing his voice in the words, the music of the language, the lyricism. I always recognize the blues, the jazz, the spiritual aspect of the world and the love in the room. I am very collaborative with actors to get their thoughts about the characters they are playing. Because I am also an actor, I like to direct the way I like to be directed. Having done over 30 of the plays, I approach them fresh. When you have new actors and new designers, I like to take a fresh approach every time. So, it's a very open, warm atmosphere, and above all, because of where we are heading in that world, we need to have fun. August Wilson plays are like doing Shakespeare: You need the skill and technique to do them proficiently. They

are not easy. Add to that the depth of character and you have a lot of work to do.

Why do you keep returning to his plays?

Good plays are good plays. Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Lorraine Hansberry, Harold Pinter, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Chekhov, Imamu Baraka, Ed Bullins, Alice Childress and many more. Good plays are good plays, so returning to do these plays is a no-brainer, but of course August in particular is fun to tackle because his plays are so rich. Telling those stories is truly an honor.



Photo of Kierra Bunch, Dimonte Henning, Marsha Estell, Bryan Bentley and Vincent Jordan.



Photo of Vincent Jordan and Kevin Brown.



Photo of Marsha Estell, Kierra Bunch and Saran Bakari.

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RUNNING TIME An accurate running time will be posted on our website on April 21.

CONTENT ADVISORY August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* is suitable for adult and older teenage audiences. This landmark script contains adult language (including the n-word) as it explores the tunes of life for the story's characters. Through poetic dialogue and blues melodies, they speak frankly and deeply about hardship, violence, death and racism.

BRAVA! THE LEADING LADIES CELEBRATE 10 YEARS

By Kendra L. Struthers

What do 394 women, eight plays, 39 events and a bathroom have in common? They are the heart of the Playhouse's Leading Ladies program. Established in 2013 as a way to foster a love of the Playhouse among theatre-loving women, the members of the Leading Ladies have raised more than \$920,000 over the last decade and collectively sponsored eight Playhouse productions from *Pride and Prejudice* in 2014 to *Steel Magnolias* in 2022. Along the way, they've enjoyed enlightening, behind-the-scenes programs about planning an artistic season, professional auditions, costuming, hand props, stage combat and more — all while enjoying good food, signature cocktails and time spent together.

For the current season, rather than sponsoring a production, the Leading Ladies have named a new women's restroom on the upper floor of the Mainstage Theatre Complex, near the Barbara M. Weyand Donor Lounge. With the establishment of the Leading Ladies Loo, the Ladies have become a permanent (and useful!) part of our new artistic facility.

Each season, two program co-chairs work with a steering committee to determine, design and execute four signature events. This year, Co-Chairs Debbie White Richardson and Marty Humes took the Leading Ladies offsite to The Carnegie and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music for events while our Mt. Adams facility was closed for construction.

Together with Event Chair Linda Holthaus and an energetic, enthusiastic 10th Anniversary Committee, Richardson and Humes have planned a very special celebration of a decade of amazing theatre this May with their final event of the season. At the 10th Anniversary Celebration, we will look back at the past decade and embrace the future of the program. Join now for the 2023-24 season, and you'll be invited to attend this once-in-a-decade event!



You don't have to be a Playhouse subscriber to join Leading Ladies — just be a woman who loves theatre and wants to learn more! For more information, contact Director of Donor Relations Kendra Struthers at kendra.struthers@cincyplay.com or 513-977-2024, or visit cincyplay.com/support/leadingladies.



Members stencil a banner at the first Leading Ladies event in 2013.



Kat Miller, Technical Theatre Specialist at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, demonstrates the magic of hand props in October 2021. Photo by Mikki Schaffner.



The Leading Ladies gather at The Carnegie for the first event of the 2022-23 season. Photo by Mikki Schaffner.



The Leading Ladies' signature cocktail at a 2021 event was the Moscow Mule. Photo by Mikki Schaffner.

THE ARTS AND CULTURE INCUBATOR FUELS PROJECTS BEYOND THE PLAYHOUSE

By Natalie Clare

This spring, the Playhouse will begin sharing our Mainstage Theatre Complex with our artistic and cultural peers through an innovative new program, the Arts and Culture Incubator. Nine organizations that serve the region through artistic and cultural work now utilize our facility to continue and build upon existing projects. Likewise, the Resident Artists program, which is part of the Arts and Culture Incubator, supports two, Cincinnati-based theatre artists in the same way.

The program was inspired by conversations held between Osborn Family Producing Artistic Director Blake Robison, Playhouse Director of Artistic Engagement Daunielle Rasmussen and several local artists during the pandemic. With operations on pause, Robison and Rasmussen sought to understand what artists and cultural organizations needed to continue their work, and they wanted to learn how the Playhouse could support them. Those needs included space, professional development, equipment and visibility, which the theatre now provides to them.

"Theatre is inherently a collaborative art form — no play makes it to the stage without the talents of a production team and a company that affords them resources. We recognize that we can provide this same kind of collaborative energy for our artistic and cultural peers. It's a privilege for us to share our new facility and its resources so that they can continue and deepen their work. Ultimately, our entire community benefits from their talents," says Robison.

Each of the Arts and Culture Incubator partners has worked with the Playhouse or with Playhouse partners in some way: through stage productions, community engagement events or Off the Grid and educational programming. Both of the Resident Artists were selected as part of The Breath Project in 2021, a national artistic initiative with whom the Playhouse partnered.

"We believe in building relationships, seeing where they organically grow and determining with the partners what they need to go to the next level of their work," says Rasmussen. "My hope is that the program will allow our partners to expand their capacity and service. I also believe that, through the cross-promotion of our partners' public events, more people will become aware of the incredible work they're creating and producing."

Learn more about the Arts and Culture Incubator and meet our partners at cincyplay.com!

ARTS AND CULTURE INCUBATOR PARTNERS

RESIDENT ARTISTS



Theatre artist
Derek J. Snow

Theatre artist
Curtis D. Shepard

ORGANIZATIONS

- Cincinnati Music Accelerator
- Cincinnati Pride
- DuWaup's Cincinnati Poetry Slam
- Elevated Aerials
- Greater Cincinnati Native American Coalition
- Heroes Rise Street Dance Academy
- Queen City Flash
- Science on Tap
- Young Professionals Choral Collective of Cincinnati

JOIN US OFF THE HILL FOR A FAMILY-FRIENDLY MYSTERY

NATE THE GREAT, THE MUSICAL

Music & Lyrics: **BRETT RYBACK**
Book & Lyrics: **JOHN MACLAY**
Directed by **ARIANA MOSES**

Live performances will be held in partnership with various community centers on weekday evenings and on the weekends from April 7 to May 5.

Nate the Great is on the case! When Annie tells Nate that her new painting has gone missing, the world's greatest boy detective sets out to solve the mystery. He tracks down clues and puts suspects to the test — and then, another mystery unfolds. Nate finds himself facing the biggest challenge of his career. And worse yet, Mom is all out of pancakes! This fun-filled musical reminds us of the importance of friendship and opening our minds to new possibilities. Recommended for kindergarten and up.

For performance details and location information, visit cincyplay.com!



PLAY IN THE PARK
CINCINNATI
HOUSE



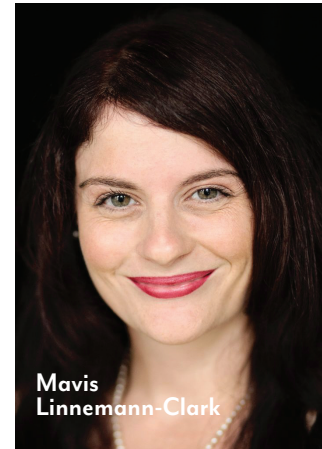
MEET THE PLAYHOUSE'S NEW CASUAL FARE DINING CATERER



The Playhouse now features casual fare dining and concessions from The Delish Dish Catering & Events. Dining options will be available for purchase before all mainstage performances in Moe and Jack's Place – The Rouse Theatre and the Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre. Meals and concessions are served on the upper floor of the lobby near the Rosenthal Shelterhouse Theatre.

Executive Chef and Owner Mavis Linnemann-Clark launched The Delish Dish and Made by Mavis Artisan Jams in 2012. The company embodies her passion for bringing gourmet food, global flavors and a knack for Southern hospitality and events to Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

“Food inspired by the cuisines of the world is our passion,” says Linnemann-Clark. “At The Delish Dish, our mission is to create unforgettable events and celebrations for our clients with outstanding food, exceptional service and unique presentation. What started as a one-woman operation has grown over the past 11 years into an award-winning, woman-owned catering and events company with more than 40 employees.”



Mavis
Linnemann-Clark

Cuisine served by The Delish Dish at the Playhouse will be an extension of The Delish Dish brand. The menu includes a variety of sandwiches, salads, soups, homemade desserts, chocolates and candy. It also includes all Made by Mavis Artisan Jams, which are featured in both sweet and savory treats. All sauces, marinades, dressings, jams, jellies and desserts are made from scratch in-house at the company's commissary. Options for special dietary requirements (including vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free diets) will be available.

