

THEATREWORKS SILICON VALLEY PRESENTS

## August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*

Directed by Tim Bond

April 6 – May 1, 2022 (opening night: April 9)

MOUNTAIN VIEW CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA (4 March 2022) — TheatreWorks Silicon Valley will present Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winner August Wilson's sweeping drama *Gem of the Ocean*. This seminal classic will be directed by Artistic Director **Tim Bond**, a close friend of the late playwright and a leading interpreter of his work, making his TheatreWorks directorial debut with this play. Part of Wilson's acclaimed American Century Cycle of ten plays that explore the African American experience during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, *Gem of the Ocean* is set in 1904 against the tempestuous backdrop of police violence and rioting. A young Black man desperate for redemption visits 285-year-old Aunt Ester, the community's spiritual advisor and keeper of collective memory. The wise elder takes him on a supernatural voyage of justice and freedom aboard a slave ship to learn the truth of his ancestors' history. *Gem of the Ocean* will be presented **April 6 – May 1, 2022** (press opening: April 9) at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts. For tickets (starting at \$30) and more information the public may visit [TheatreWorks.org](http://TheatreWorks.org) or call (877)-662-8978.

"August was a dear friend of mine and his inspiring and beautiful play speaks to this current moment," said **Tim Bond** of producing *Gem of the Ocean*. "With TheatreWorks' very first production in 1970—the musical *Popcorn*—Robert Kelley and his band of theatre artists rallied a community together through story and through the power of theatre. The issues of those times were not unlike the pressing concerns of today. Once again, we find ourselves in a time of uncertainty, loss, and a hope for a better world and I believe August's spiritual and redemptive journey will be an inspiration for us all."

Following a World Premiere production at the Goodman Theatre, *Gem of the Ocean* ran on Broadway, where it was nominated for five Tony Awards including Best Play. *The New York Times* deemed *Gem of the Ocean* "a swelling overture of things to come, a battle hymn for an inchoate republic of African Americans just beginning to discover the price of freedom." *Variety* lauded the play as a "slow-burning, powerfully spiritual drama." Regarding a recent production, *Chicago Tribune* claimed "It is impossible

to watch ‘*Gem*,’ with its emphasis on the relationship of African Americans to police officers, without thinking about the numerous clashes that have raised questions of equality, morality, law-and-order and which lives matter the most.”

Bond and TheatreWorks have assembled a cast of Broadway and local talents to bring this classic play to life. Acclaimed actor **Greta Oglesby** stars as spiritual advisor Aunt Ester after originating the role in the World Premiere Production and in Bond’s Oregon Shakespeare Festival production. An Ivey Award, Joseph Jefferson Award, and Black Theatre Alliance Award winner, Oglesby was the standby for Phylicia Rashad for *A Raisin in the Sun* on Broadway and performed in “A Night with Jeanine Tesori” as part of Lincoln Center’s American Songbook series. Her many theatre appearances include roles at The Public Theater, 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y, Steppenwolf Theatre, Guthrie Theater, Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Royale Theatre, Penumbra Theatre, and Lincoln Center. Her film/ TV credits include *Queenpins*, CBS’ “Early Edition,” NBC’s “Chicago PD,” *Into Temptation*, *Time Served*, and *Four Way Stop*.

**Edward Ewell** makes his TheatreWorks debut as Citizen Barlow, a troubled man seeking redemption. Ewell has performed throughout the Bay Area at Marin Theatre Company, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Shotgun Players, African-American Shakespeare Company, San Jose Stage Company, TheatreFirst, Bay Area Playwrights Foundation, and American Conservatory Theater, from which he received his M.F.A.

**Porsha Shaw** debuts at TheatreWorks as Black Mary, Aunt Ester’s protégé. Shaw is a graduate of the Professional Actor Training Program at the University of Washington. She is a native of Texas and a graduate of Santa Fe University of Art and Design where she majored in Drama under the training of Jon Jory. Shaw has performed at Seattle Repertory Theatre, 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Theatre, ArtsWest, Jones Playhouse and more.

**Kim Sullivan** debuts at TheatreWorks as Solly Two Kings, a former slave and conductor on the Underground Railroad who fights for freedom for all. An Audelco Award Winner, Sullivan has performed in all ten plays in August Wilson’s American Century Cycle with American Stage Theatre Company. Sullivan has been seen Off-Broadway at theatres including Ensemble Studio Theatre, Classical Theatre of Harlem, and American Place Theatre. His regional theatre appearances include Actor’s Theatre of Louisville, Woolly Mammoth Theatre, Cleveland Playhouse, Milwaukee Repertory Company, Arizona Theatre Company, Long Wharf Theatre, and Arden Theatre. Sullivan’s TV/ film

credits include roles in HBO's "Girls," ABC's "One Life to Live," NBC's "100 Centre Street," NBC's "Law and Order/ Trial by Jury," and United Artists' *Willie Dynamite*.

**Jerome Preston Bates** debuts at TheatreWorks as Eli, a companion of Aunt Ester. Seen on Broadway in *American Son*, *Jitney*, *Stick Fly*, and *Seven Guitars*, Bates performed in the World Premiere of August Wilson's *Seven Guitars* at Goodman Theatre. His Off-Broadway theatre performances include New Federal Theatre, Abingdon Theatre Company, and Circle Repertory Company. Additional regional theatre performances include shows at The Old Globe, Arena Stage, Alley Stage, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Center Stage, Classical Theatre of Harlem, Long Wharf Theatre, and Wilma Theatre. Bates' TV/ film credits include ABC's "All My Children," ABC's "NYPD Blue," NBC's "Third Watch," HBO's "Oz," Fox's "New York Undercover," NBC's "Law & Order: SVU," Lionsgate's *Peeples*, MGM's *It Runs in the Family*, Paramount Pictures' *Shaft*, and Paramount Pictures' *The Out of Towners*.

**Rodney Hicks** debuts at TheatreWorks as Caesar, a Black policeman and Black Mary's brother. Hicks was seen on Broadway in *Come from Away*, *The Scottsboro Boys*, *Rent*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Hicks' Off-Broadway performances include *The Scottsboro Boys*, *The Nightshade Family*, *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*, *Dorian Gray*, *From my Hometown*, *Rent*, *Lotto*, and *Bring in the Morning*. Hicks has acted in productions at regional theatres including The Muny, La Jolla Playhouse, Long Wharf Theatre, The 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Theatre, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and The Ford's Theatre. Hicks' film/ TV credits include *Rent: Filmed Live on Broadway*, Paramount Pictures' *Mighty Oak*, TNT's "Leverage," NBC's "Grimm," ABC's "Hope and Faith," NBC's "Law & Order: CI," and ABC's "NYPD Blue."

**Dan Hiatt** returns to TheatreWorks as Rutherford Selig, a white traveling salesman. Seen in TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's *They Promised Her the Moon*, *Mark Twain's River of Song*, *Upright Grand*, *The Pitmen Painters*, *The 39 Steps*, and *Twentieth Century*, Hiatt has also performed at American Conservatory Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, California Shakespeare Festival, Marin Theatre Company, San Jose Repertory Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and Pasadena Playhouse.

*Gem of the Ocean* features scenic design by **William Bloodgood**, costume design by **Lydia Tanji**, lighting design by **Lonnie Rafael Alcaarez**, and sound design by **Michael Keck**. **Taylor McQuesten** serves as stage manager, with **Chloe Schweizer** as assistant stage manager.

**August Wilson** authored *Gem of the Ocean*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (TheatreWorks 1989), *The Piano Lesson*, *Seven Guitars*, *Fences* (TheatreWorks 2000), *Two Trains Running* (TheatreWorks 1996), *Jitney*, *King Hedley II*, and *Radio Golf* (TheatreWorks 2008), all works exploring the heritage and experience of African Americans, decade-by-decade, over the course of the twentieth century. His plays have been produced all over the world, as well as on Broadway and have garnered awards including Pulitzer Prizes for *Fences* (1987) and *The Piano Lesson* (1990), a Tony Award for *Fences*, Great Britain's Olivier Award for *Jitney*, and eight New York Drama Critics Circle Awards, among many others. 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*. 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. Mr. Wilson was posthumously inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame in 2007.

**Tim Bond** (Director) is the second Artistic Director in TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's 51-year history. He was chosen to succeed founding artistic director Robert Kelley who retired in 2020, and joined the company shortly before the pandemic shut down. Overseeing the company's virtual productions while theatres were closed, he is in his first live season at the helm of TheatreWorks Silicon Valley and makes his TheatreWorks directorial debut with *Gem of the Ocean*. Prior to this, Bond served as Artistic Director for Seattle Group Theatre, where he curated the company's nationally recognized MultiCultural Playwrights Festival and was an Associate Artistic Director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where he created the FAIR Program cultivating the next generation of diverse theatre artists and administrators. He has helmed a host of award-winning productions at theatres around the globe and is a leading director of the works of playwright August Wilson, with whom he had a close friendship and longstanding working relationship.

**TheatreWorks Silicon Valley** was founded in 1970 by **Robert Kelley** and has grown from an original Silicon Valley start-up to become one of the region's leading professional nonprofit theatre companies. TheatreWorks was honored as the recipient of the 2019 Regional Theatre Tony Award, the highest honor bestowed on a non-Broadway theatre. Now in its 51st season and led by Artistic Director **Tim Bond** and Executive Director **Phil Santora**, TheatreWorks presents a wide variety of contemporary plays and musicals, revitalizes great works of the past, and serves more than 100,000 patrons per year. TheatreWorks also champions new work, offering artists support and a creative home as they develop

new stories for the American theatre. Offstage, TheatreWorks' arts education programs in local schools and arts engagement programs in Silicon Valley neighborhoods uplift its audiences and strengthen community bonds. Whether onstage or off, TheatreWorks seeks to celebrate the human spirit and the diversity of the Silicon Valley community.

Media sponsor for TheatreWorks Silicon Valley's 2021/2022 season is The San Francisco Chronicle.

### For Calendar Editors:

**WHAT:** TheatreWorks Silicon Valley will present Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winner August Wilson's sweeping drama ***Gem of the Ocean***. This seminal classic will be directed by Artistic Director **Tim Bond**, a close friend of the late playwright and a leading interpreter of his work, making his TheatreWorks directorial debut with this play. Part of Wilson's acclaimed American Century Cycle of ten plays that explore the African American experience during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, ***Gem of the Ocean*** is set in 1904 against the tempestuous backdrop of police violence and rioting. A young Black man desperate for redemption visits 285-year-old Aunt Ester, the community's spiritual advisor and keeper of collective memory. The wise elder takes him on a supernatural voyage of justice and freedom aboard a slave ship to learn the truth of his ancestors' history. ***Gem of the Ocean*** was nominated for five Tony Awards including Best Play. *The New York Times* deemed ***Gem of the Ocean*** "a swelling overture of things to come, a battle hymn for an inchoate republic of African Americans just beginning to discover the price of freedom." *Variety* lauded the play as a "slow-burning, powerfully spiritual drama." Regarding a recent production, *Chicago Tribune* claimed "It is impossible to watch 'Gem,' with its emphasis on the relationship of African Americans to police officers, without thinking about the numerous clashes that have raised questions of equality, morality, law-and-order and which lives matter the most."

**WHEN:** Previews: Wednesday, April 6 – Friday, April 8, 2022  
*Opening: Saturday, April 9, 2022*  
Closes: Sunday, May 1, 2022

**SHOWS:** Previews: 8:00pm  
Tuesdays: 7:30pm  
Wednesdays: 2:00pm, 7:30pm  
Thursdays & Fridays: 8:00pm  
Saturdays: 2:00pm, 8:00pm  
Sundays: 2:00pm, 7:00pm

**WHERE:** Live performances at **Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts**, 500 Castro Street, Mountain View

**TICKETS:** Ticket prices start at \$30; savings available for educators, seniors, and patrons 35 and under. Pricing subject to change.

**INFO:** For information or to order tickets visit **theatreworks.org** or call **(877)-662-8978**

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**PRESS:** Contact Lauren Goldfarb, Carla Befera & Co.  
[lauren@cb-pr.com](mailto:lauren@cb-pr.com)

**PHOTOS:** Downloadable high-res photos are available here: <http://cbpr.co/press/gemoftheocean>