

CIRCLE THEATRE

The logo for Circle Theatre, featuring a stylized white line drawing of a modern building with a curved facade and a smaller structure to the right, set against a dark background.

MA
RAINEY'S
BLACK
BOTTOM



2023 SEASON

GENERAL INFORMATION

BOX OFFICE HOURS

MONDAY - FRIDAY | 12PM - 5PM

MONDAY - FRIDAY PERFORMANCE DAYS | 12PM - CURTAIN

SATURDAY | 2PM - CURTAIN

SUNDAY | 12PM - CURTAIN

LATE ARRIVALS

Patrons arriving late will be seated at the House Manager's discretion.

NO STANDING

No standing is permitted in the back of the theatre. If you become uncomfortable and/or have to move out of your seat for any reason, you may stretch your legs in the upper or lower lobby.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Please turn off all electronic devices that light up or make noise. Please, no texting. The taking of pictures and/or recordings (audio or video) is prohibited; the device may be taken from you and held until after the show.

EMERGENCY CALLS

If you anticipate the need to be reached in the event of an emergency, you may leave your name and seat number with the House Manager. A House Manager will also be available in the House during the run of the show. Our emergency contact number is **616 632 2996**. In the event that someone is not available at this number, Aquinas College Campus Safety's number is **616 632 2462**; a dispatcher is available 24/7.

YOUNG AUDIENCE

Most Main Stage productions are geared toward mature audiences and may not be appropriate for younger audiences. Our Magic Circle productions provide wonderful family entertainment and an introduction to the live theatre experience. Please call the box office at **616 456 6656** for information on age appropriateness of any of our shows. Children below school age may not attend our Main Stage productions. Please, no babes in arms or toddlers. At no time can a child enter the auditorium without a ticket.

SPECIAL PATRON SERVICES

An induction loop is provided for the benefit of hearing aid users. To use, please switch your hearing aid to "T." Handicapped and wheelchair seating is available and easily accessible. When reserving tickets, please notify the box office personnel of any special needs or seating requirements.

SMOKING

Aquinas College is a smoke-free campus.



CIRCLETHEATRE.ORG | 616 456 6656

BOX OFFICE | 1703 ROBINSON RD SE

WELCOME TO OUR CIRCLE

Greetings!

As we near the end of our season I find it hard to believe that summer is almost over. Thankfully, we have some great shows to round out our 2023 season. This August we are presenting August Wilson's Ma Rainey's Black Bottom. American Blues was strongly influenced by artists like Ma Rainey.

This evening you might have noticed there were posters featured throughout the lobby with information about the show. In case you missed these posters or didn't get to read everything, the information and more can be found towards the back of the program.

Now sit back, relax and let us transport you to life, music and tensions in Chicago during the 1920's.

As always, thank you for your continued support of Circle Theatre.



Lynn Atkins-Rykert
President of the Board of Directors

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Lynn Atkins-Rykert | PRESIDENT

Mark Schmidbauer | FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

Jeff Kemperman | SECOND VICE PRESIDENT

Bob Lowry | TREASURER

Sara Dart | SECRETARY

Derek Call | PAST PRESIDENT

Stathi Afendoulis

Rebecca Dickenson

Shelley Irwin

R. Scott Keller

Lisa M. Knight

Jeffrey Augustine Songco

Trevor Straub

Lou VanderHave

**IF A PICTURE
IS WORTH
1,000 WORDS,
ARE YOUR
STAFF
PORTRAITS
SAYING THE
RIGHT WORDS
ABOUT YOUR
COMPANY?**



birdbirdstudio.com/pfp



FINALE PARTNER LEVEL

CIRCLE SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

Warner Norcross + Judd

OFFICIAL HEADSHOTS

The People Picture Company

ACT 2 PARTNER LEVEL

SEASON PRINTED MATERIALS

AllQuest

WEBSITE PROVIDER

Intellectual Ninjas

OFFICIAL VIDEOGRAPHER

SJK Productions

OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPHER

Ashlee Lambart Photography

ACT 1 PARTNER LEVEL

BLITHE SPIRIT

Overhead Door

COMMUNITY EQUITABLE ACCESS

PROGRAM PARTNER

Steelcase

IN-KIND PARTNERS

TECH MEAL PROVIDER

KJ Catering

This season is made possible with the support from the Wege Foundation, as well as the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, a partner Agency of The National Endowment for the Arts.



STAFF & CREATIVE

Lynne Brown Tepper

Executive and Artistic Director

Olivia Bentley

Marketing & Outreach Specialist

Mary Jo Denolf

Interim Experience Manager

Lisa Mathias

Financial Accounts Coordinator

Kelsey Edwards

Resident Scenic Designer
& Technical Director

Sam Verburg

Master Electrician/Master Carpenter

Dominic Lannon, Tiersza Phipps

Carpenters

Reese Verlinde

Marketing & Outreach Intern,

Shannon Heldt

Box Office Assistant/Intern

**Hunter Denkema, Grace Giroux, Kikka Go,
Shannon Heldt, Drew Heugli, Gabrielle Lee,
Hannah Morey, Meridian Pearson, Nina
Smith, Annah Stang, Fiona Walsh**
Experience Associates

Ashlee Lambart Photography

Official Photographer

SJK Video Productions

Production & Archival Videographer

Caroline Cahoon

Production Graphics

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We collectively acknowledge that Grand Rapids Circle Theatre occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg – Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. The Grand Rapids Circle Theatre is built on native land of The Three Fires People, as they are indigenous to this land. We understand that we are guests on this native land, and in doing so we would like to acknowledge the histories and traditions of the The Three Fires People. It is important to us that we are continuously advocating for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in our community.



Proudly supporting
Circle Theatre's
commitment to the
community



Warner provides quality legal services to clients of all sizes; operating in Michigan, North America and around the world.



Warner

Grand Rapids | Detroit
Midland | Macomb County
Muskegon | Kalamazoo
Holland | Lansing
Bloomfield Hills

wnj.com

August Wilson's **MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM**

Director
Will Gearing

Co-Music Director
Vanessa Allen

Co- Music Director
Debra Perry

Stage Manager
Sarah Carey-Stoddard

Originally produced by
Yale Repertory Theatre
(Lloyd Richards, Artistic Director,
Bejamin Mordecai, Managing Director)

Initially presented at the 1982 National Playwrights' Conference by
The Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center

August Wilson's Ma Rainey's Black Bottom
is presented through special arrangement with
Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.
www.concordtheatricals.com

**THE VIDEOTAPING OR OTHER VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDING
OF THIS PRODUCTION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED**

SPECIAL THANKS

Ellygene DeGraaf
Emma Hill
Herman & Sons Piano Co.

A force
for **impact**,
for **equity**,
for **good**,
for all.



Steelcase
Social Innovation

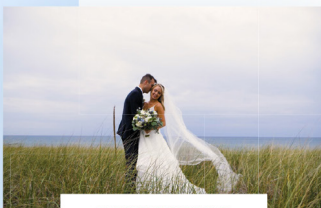
CAST

SLOW DRAG Keon Atkins
MA RAINEY..... CaSaundra Ce'Moune (CC)
POLICEMAN Stephen Huseby
SYLVESTER Jhaiell Kilgore
LEVEE Noah King-Bates
STURDYVANT..... Richard Mulligan
TOLEDO Debra L. Perry
DUSSIE MAE Erica Starks
IRVIN..... Michael Stoddard
CUTLER..... Michael P. Travis



PRODUCTIONS

We are proud to support
Circle Theatre



WEDDINGS



EVENTS

A photograph of a city skyline at sunset, with the sun low on the horizon and the buildings illuminated by the warm light of the setting sun. The water of a bay or river is visible in the foreground.

COMMERCIAL

CAST



Keon
Atikins



CaSaundra
Ce'Moune (CC)



Stephen
Huseby



Jhaiell
Kilgore



Noah
King-Bates



Richard
Mulligan



Debra L.
Perry



Erica
Starks



Michael
Stoddard



Michael P.
Travis

PRODUCTION STAFF

DIRECTOR	Will Gearing
CO-MUSIC DIRECTOR	Vanessa Allen
CO-MUSIC DIRECTOR	Debra L. Perry
STAGE MANAGER.....	Sarah Carey-Stoddard
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER	Kay Felty
SCENIC DESIGNER/TECHNICAL DIRECTOR.....	Kelsey Edwards
LIGHTING DESIGNER.....	Sam Verbug
LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR.....	Antonio Aguilar
SOUND DESIGNER.....	Sam Johnson-Begay
SOUND TECHNICIAN	Danielle Fought
COSTUME DESIGNER	Jess Luiz
HAIR & MAKE UP DESIGNER.....	Christina Barrera
PROPERTIES DESIGNER.....	Meaghan Gietzen
DECK CREW.....	Cj Wood, Asher Deyoung

**ASH
LEE
PHOTO**

ASHLEELAMBARTPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

PRODUCTION STAFF



Will
Gearing



Vanessa
Allen



Debra L.
Perry



Sarah
Carey-Stoddard



Kay
Felty



Kelsey
Edwards



Sam
Verburg



Sam
Johnson-Begay



Danielle
Faight



Jess
Luiz



Christina
Barrera



Meaghan
Gietzen

The '23/'24 Civic Season

THE NICKELODEON
SPONGEBOB
MUSICAL

September 15 -
October 8
RATED PG

 MUSICAL

DISNEY'S
Beauty AND THE BEAST
THE MUSICAL

November 17 -
December 17
RATED PG

 MUSICAL

CLYDE'S

January 19 - 28
RATED R

 PLAY

DISNEY'S
DESCENDANTS
THE MUSICAL

March 1 - 17
RATED G

 MUSICAL

agatha christie's
MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS
a ken ludwig adaptation

April 19 - May 5
RATED PG-13

 PLAY

TEN FOR ALL
4th Annual Playwriting Festival

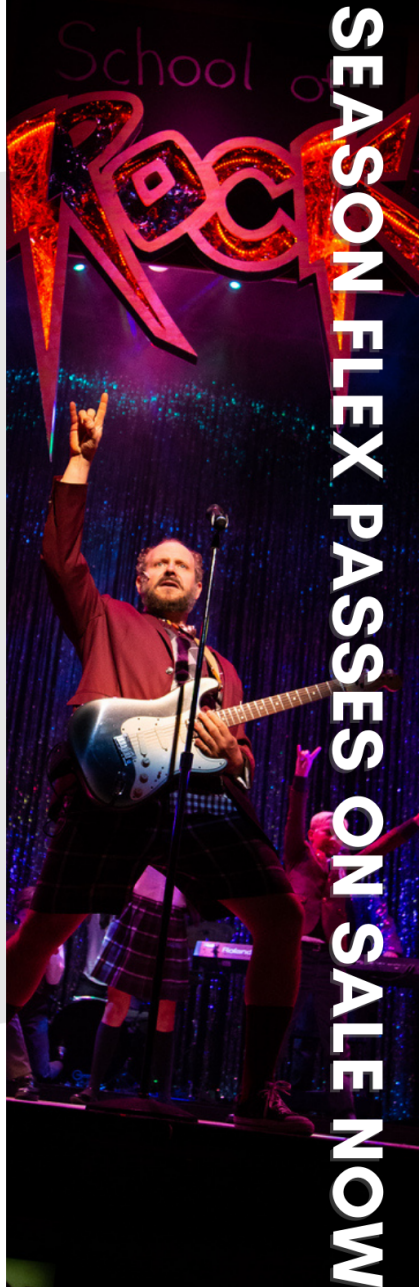
May 17 - 18
RATING PENDING

 SPECIAL EVENT

Beautiful
The Carole King Musical

June 7 - 30
RATED PG-13

 MUSICAL



Purchase your Season Flex Pass now and save, plus secure your seats today!



GRAND RAPIDS
CIVIC THEATRE

30 DIVISION AVE N DOWNTOWN GRAND RAPIDS

TICKETS: GRCT.ORG



WHO'S WHO | CAST

KEON ATKINS *He/Him (Slow Drag)*

past credits include *Songs in the Key of Stevie* (Vocalist) at Circle Theatre; *Once on This Island* (Papa Ge), *Suzannah* by Carlisle Floyd (Lil Bat), *The Marriage of Figaro* (Don Basillo), *Singing in Place Series* (OGR), *I Dream, Samson and Delilah*, and *The Gondoliers* by Gilbert and Sullivan (Marco) at various Theaters and Operas including Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, West Michigan Opera Project, Opera Grand Rapids, and West Michigan Savoyards; Soloist and chorister for Holland Chorale, Park Church, Marvin Winans, and other organizations. Keon graduated from the University of Michigan in 2009 and currently works as a Statewide Program Lead for Consumers Energy.

CASAUNDRRA CE'MOUNE (CC) *She/Her (Ma Rainey)*

past credits include *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Assistant Director), *Settling Sophia* (Assistant Director), *Settling Sophia* (Dulcie Reynolds), *Zooman and The Sign* (Ash Boswell), *Big White Fog* (Juanita), and *Flyin' West* (Minnie Dove Charles) at Western Michigan University; *The Piano Lesson* (Berniece Charles) at Kalamazoo Civic Theatre and Kalamazoo Epic Theatre; *Remants from Senegal* (Reba) with Washington Theatre Productions Theatre Company. CaSaundra is a graduate of Western Michigan University, where she received a Bachelors degree in Liberal Arts with an Emphasis in Performance Theatre (1999) and

a Masters of Fine Arts degree in Playwriting (2004). One day she WILL finish her Doctoral of Fine Arts degree in Playwriting!! CaSaundra is currently an Auto Claims adjuster with Farmers Insurance. Drive Responsibly! *"Special Thanks for my son, for being the easiest challenge. For reminding me that I was more than just his mother when he became an adult. Thank you for always seeing me, for motivating and encouraging me, to get back to my passion. Thank you for being YOU!!!"*

STEPHEN HUSEBY *He/Him (Police Officer)*

past credits include *Chicago* (Amos Hart) with Betka-Pope Productions; *Kinky Boots* (Don), *The Sound of Music* (Captain Von Trapp), and *Once* (Billy) at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre. Stephen is an award-winning documentarian and creator of a framework for working in areas of conflict called "Trauma-Informed Media;" teaching that all over the world. Currently, he works in home remodeling.

JHAIELL KILGORE *He/Him (Sylvester)*

past credits include *Kill Move Paradise* and *Lobby Hero* with GRCC Players. Jhaiell is a 2022 graduate of Public Museum High and is currently studying theatre at Grand Rapids Community College. Hobbies include theatre, music, and basketball. *"Special thanks to Will, Sarah, and the entire cast and crew."*

WHO'S WHO | CAST

NOAH KING-BATES *He/Him (Levee)*

past credits include *Indecent* (Avram); *Almost, Maine* (Various); *Creation of the World and Other Business* (Assistant Director); *Little Shop of Horrors* (Plant Puppeteer); *Music Man* (Tommy Djilas); *The Play that Goes Wrong* (Trevor). Noah graduated from Western Michigan University with degrees in Theatre Studies and History. Hobbies include cosplaying, D&D, and reading comics.

RICHARD MULLIGAN *He/Him (Sturdyvant)*

past credits include *Snow White and The Adventures of Treasure Island* at Circle Theatre; *Dearly Departed*, *12 Angry Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *All the Way*, and *Shakespeare in Love* at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre; *Cheaper by the Dozen* and *Father Brown Mysteries* with Master Arts Theatre. Richard is self employed as a health and life insurance agent. He owns RAM & ELM Benefit Solutions working with business owners to establish, enhance or improve employee benefit packages. Summertime activities include softball, golf, camping, travel and theater. *"Special thanks to my love, my inspiration, my everything, MOAO ~ Natalie."*

DEBRA L. PERRY *She/Her (Toledo/Co-Music Director)* has a long relationship with Circle Theatre. Debra comes from behind the piano in her first acting debut as "Toledo" in *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Her musician credits include: *Smokey*

Joe's Cafe, *Ain't Misbehavin*, *A Chorus Line*, and *Musical* director credits include *Rent*, *Patsy Cline*, *Cabaret*, *Music Man* and more. Debra was featured along with her long-time friend Vanessa Allen in Circle's Pop Up Concert Series, in several virtual Circle concerts and has served as music director for several of Circle's summer concerts. Deb began her musical career at age 6 and has mastered 10 instruments including drums, bass guitar, organ, piano, and saxophone. She is a music educator of 28 years with Grand Rapids Public Schools, obtained a BA and an MA in Music Education from Western Michigan University, and an MA in Educational Leadership from GVSU. Debra has been the recipient of numerous awards including the distinguished Ethel Coe Giant's Award and the Grand Rapids Symphony Malinda P. Sapp Legacy Award. She is a noted songwriter and arranger and has composed works for national artists and has orchestrated full-scale works for the Grand Rapids Symphony and Westshore Symphony. Debra founded her own chorale Majestic Praise and is CEO of Joint Heir Music Group, her own record label, and Joint Heir Music Studios. Her business earned the Renaissance Award from the Grand Rapids Area Black Businesses Association. *"Thanks to family, friends and the Circle Theate community."*

WHO'S WHO | CAST

ERICA STARKS she/her (**Dussie Mae**) past credits include *The Crucible* (Assistant Director) at Potters House High School; *Hair* (Ensemble) at Circle Theatre; *Little Women* (Jo March) at Potters House High School; *Once on this Island* (Ensemble) at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre. Erica is a junior at Potters House High School.

MICHAEL STODDARD He/Him (**Irvin**) is currently a manager of HRIS with CSX Transportation. *"I would like to thank my Partners Sarah and Lane, and our daughters Riley and Cass for supporting me in returning to the stage after 16 years for my first ever Circle show!"*

MICHAEL P. TRAVIS (**Cutler**) past credits include *Hair* (Ensemble), *Ain't Misbehavin* (Ensemble), *Smokey Joe's Cafe* (Ensemble), *Lucky Stiff* (Ensemble) *Once on this Island* (Ton Ton Julian), *Piano Lesson* (Boy Willy), and *Master Harold & the Boys* (Willie Malopo) at Circle Theatre. Michael received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology from Central Michigan University and is currently retired. Michael is now a Part Time Advisor at Mayweather Boxing and Fitness. Some hobbies include theatre, golf, and boxing.

**PROUD SPONSOR OF CIRCLE THEATRE
PRINTED MATERIALS**

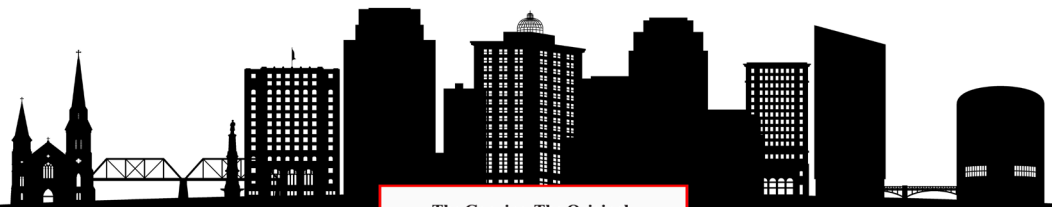
A | I |  | U | E | S | T

Printing | Signage | Branding

616.822.2200

joe@allquestgr.com

PROUD Supporter of the Arts in **GRAND RAPIDS**



KJC Catering

616-805-4590

- Weddings
- Anniversaries
- Engagement Parties
- Dinner Parties
- Grand Openings
- Corporate Functions
- Graduation Open House
- ... and so much more!



www.kjcatering.net
info@kjcatering.net



WHO'S WHO | PRODUCTION STAFF

VANESSA ALLEN *She/Her (Co-Music Director)* has served as a Music Director for Circle Theatre, Muskegon Civic Theatre, WMU Theatre, Muskegon HS Theatre, Muskegon Heights HS Theatre and Ottawa Hills HS Theatre productions. Circle productions include *Crowns*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, *The Marvelous Wonderettes: Caps & Gowns*, *Carrie The Musical*, *A Chorus Line*, *Joseph & The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Always Patsy Cline*, *Cabaret* and *The Music Man*. Vanessa also collaborated/co-music directed last season with her long-time friend Debra Perry on *The Music Man*. Other area credits include *The Wiz* and *Tambourine To Glory*. A graduate of Muskegon Community College, Hope College, Western Michigan University, and Grand Valley State University, she is a fine arts/shared time teacher with Grand Rapids Public Schools and enjoys working within organizations that provide access and opportunities for equity and inclusion.

CHRISTINA BARRERA *She/Her (Hair & Makeup Designer)* past credit includes doing Hair and Makeup for a production of *Cabaret*. Christina is the owner of Barrera Hair Company. *"I want to give a special thank you to the Circle Theatre for allowing me to be a part of this production."*

SARAH CAREY-STODDARD *She/Her (Stage Manager)* has always dreamed of spending her free time in the arts ever since she was

a kid, and every minute spent in the theatre is a minute of dreaming. She is a stay at home mom, and a 2007 graduate of Blue Heron Academy. She credits Civic Theatre's "Ten for All" Festival and *The Awakening* (Elizabeth Lockwood), as well as Circle Theatre's *Blithe Spirit* (Stage Manager), *Cabaret* (Deck Crew) and *HAIR* (Sound Assistant) as previous experience. *"Thanks to my partners who always make it possible for my passions. And Will for kicking my butt into gear to do it."*

KELSEY EDWARDS *She/Her (Scenic Designer)* is the Technical Director and Resident Scenic Designer at Circle Theatre. A few of her favorite productions include *Lysistrata*, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-In-Moon Marigolds* and *Nightblooming* at Adrian College, and *Ada and the Engine* at Aquinas College. In 2021 she graduated from Adrian College with a B.A. in theatre. Kelsey enjoys knitting, reading many books, and loves spending time with her loved ones. She would like to thank her amazing team that helped her bring this show to you! She also hopes that you all enjoy the show and the amazing work everyone has done.

WHO'S WHO | PRODUCTION STAFF

DANIELLE FAUGHT *She/Her* (**Sound Technician**) has been active in the backstage aspect of theatre in the Grand Rapids area since 2011 where she served as deck crew, light board operator, dresser, fly rail operator, sound technician, assistant stage manager and stage manager. One of her favorite shows to crew was Ragtime. A graduate of Sparta High School, she currently works at Saint Mary's Hospital. In her downtime, she loves hanging with her 2 kids and family and enjoys playing video games.

KAY FELTY *They/She* (**Assistant Stage Manager**) past credits include *Something Rotten* (Dresser) at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, *Kill, Move, Paradise* (Sound Operator) for GRCC Players, *Creation of The World and Other Business* (Deck Crew) at Jewish Theatre Grand Rapids, *Biloxi Blues* (Costume Manager) at Jewish Theatre Grand Rapids. Kay is a 2023 graduate of GRCC with an associates in theatre, and have been a scare actor at The Haunt since. *"Special thanks to my boyfriend Will Korest for being there for me and helping me out with anything involving theatre, and another big thanks to my parents for encouraging me to get further involved in the performing arts community."*

WILL GEARRING (**Director**) is a graduate of Aquinas College and is currently the Vice President of Operations for EnviroSAFE. Past

credits include *American Son* (Lt. John Stokes) at BAM Talent, *Kill, Move Paradise* (Director) at GRCC and *Cabaret* (Director) at Circle Theatre. Other Circle credits include serving as director for *Snow White* and as the Assistant Director for *Superior Donuts*. Will was also one of the directors for the "Ten for All" play festival at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre. Audiences may remember Will for his on stage role in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. A graduate of Aquinas College, he is currently Vice President of Operations for EnviroSAFE.

MEAGHAN GIETZEN *She/Her* (**Properties Designer**) past credits include *Into The Woods* (Little Red), *The Wolves* (#13), and *Xanadu* (Sonny Malone). Meaghan graduated from Kendall College of Art & Design in 2019 with a BFA in Medical Illustration, she is currently working as a freelance artist and illustrator working on all different kinds of projects from teaching backstage classes to working in the anatomy lab at MSU's College of Human Medicine. *"I would like to thank my amazing moms, my sister, and my Aunt Debbi for always supporting my theatrical journey whether it be onstage, backstage, or anywhere in between. I would also like to thank my cat, Temperance, for being the best scene partner while studying my lines each night!"*

WHO'S WHO | PRODUCTION STAFF

SAM JOHNSON-BEGAY *He/Him* (**Sound Designer**) has designed 250+ productions. Select favorites include *Ragtime* at Grand Valley Opera, *Carrie the Musical* and *Freaky Friday* at Circle, *Sister Act*, *Shrek*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Newsies*, *Matilda* and *Once* at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, and *If/Then* at Actors' Theatre. He has been involved in Grand Rapids theatre since 2001 and is currently the resident Sound Designer and Engineer for Grand Rapids Civic Theatre. He started at Circle in the Park in 2002 and has designed all of the shows for Circle Theatre since 2017. *"For Dez and Ean, all my love, always."*

JESS LUIZ *She/Her* (**Costume Designer**) has designed costumes for this season's *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *The Three Musketeers* and the upcoming show, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. Other Circle credits include *Little Shop of Horrors*, *RENT* and the Magic Circle Production *Dogs Love Cupcakes*. Favorite costume design credits include co-designing *Once on This Island* at Grand Rapids Civic Theatre, *Kill, Move, Paradise* and *Eurydice* at GRCC, and *Sweat* at Actors' Theatre. Jess studied Theatre and Northern Michigan University. In addition to costume design, she also performs and teaches theatre through West Michigan.

SAM VERBURG *They/Him* (**Lighting Designer**) past credits include *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* (Stage Manager) at AQ College Theater, *Biloxi Blues* (Eugene) at Jewish Theater, *Wizard of Oz* (Lighting Designer) at Forest Hills Central, and *Kill Move Paradise* (Lighting Designer) at GRCC Players. Sam is a 2020 graduate of Aquinas College and is currently working as a freelance designer and technician for corporate events, concerts, theatrical performances, and broadcasts. In their spare time he loves to read, write, and play music. *"I'd like to thank my parents for getting me to where I am today. They have supported me and saved me throughout my life, and I wouldn't be half the person that I am today without them. Thank you Mom and Dad, I'll get you back someday."*

Season Ticket Packages On Sale Now!

Disney
Aladdin
 THE HIT BROADWAY MUSICAL

©Disney

**FUNNY
 GIRL**

Tina
 THE TINA TURNER MUSICAL



Photo: Pat Quinn

HARPER LEE'S
**TO KILL A
 MOCKINGBIRD**
 A New Play by
AARON SORKIN
 Directed by
BARTLETT SHER

MJ
 THE MUSICAL



ADD TO YOUR PACKAGE

WICKED



ADD TO YOUR PACKAGE

*Les
 Misérables*



©Disney

(616) 235-6285 • BroadwayGrandRapids.com
 DeVos Performance Hall

Subscribe Now



Title Sponsor:



Season Sponsor:



SUPPORT CIRCLE

Norma's Circle (\$5,000+)

Pamela & John Burch
Judy Maggini
Catherine Augenstein
Anonymous
Anonymous

Opening Night (\$2,500-4,999)

Anonymous

Circle In The PAC (\$500 - \$2,499)

Hugh & Marilyn Barnard
Richard & Tracy Cassard
Susie Cleland & Jane Gietzen
Scott Nowakowski & Deb Cleland
Marilyn Dooge
Patricia Dutkiewicz
John R. Hunting
Scott & Michelle Keller
Harry & Sheila Knopke
Melissa Kutsche
Carol & Ron La Mange
Robert Lowry
James Schipper & Jane Frey
Becky Summers
Anonymous
Eva Switek
Mary Thorrington
Frank & Sharon Van Haven
Lou Vanderhave
In Memory of Bob Goudzwaard
Gary Walker
Christopher & Sara Witmer
Anonymous
Anonymous

Circle In The Park (\$350 - \$499)

Jeffrey and Sheila Frank
Catherine Marlett-Dreher
Douglas Parker
Judith Subar
Peter White

Circle In The Pantlind (\$200 - \$349)

Bob Maxam & Jim Rekucki
Jim & Mary Atkinson
Maureen Fahey Dreher
Blackbaud Giving Fund
Buz & Terrie Graeber
Anonymous
Bill & Vicki Hall

Robyn Hubbard
Tom & Barb Macwilliams
Greg & Karen Rademacher
Susan A. Stoddard
Carole Sutphen
Bob & Marilyn Varty

Circle In The Rowe (\$100 - \$199)

Elizabeth Atkinson Cole
Catherine Augenstein
Robin Bentley
Tom & Sandy Blackwell
Michael Bosscher
Steve Carlson
William Coyne
Maureen Fahey Dreher
In Memory of Sharyll Brown
Matt Goldman
Tim & Darcy Hartley
Maurie Houseman
Troy and Mike
Bill and Jan Lewis
Marcia McEvoy
Lori Jacobs and Gary Moore
Sean Patterson
Robert Peabody
Frederick Rundquist
Evelyn Searl
Mary Thorrington
Patti Trepkowski
Selene Van Vleck
Jeffrey Vanwinkle
Sandra Vesbit
David Weinandy
Johanna Wilberding
Joan Wilson
Alexander Winn
Joann & Peter Woodfield
Leslie Wooldridge

Dress Rehearsal (\$25 - \$99)

Rick Allen
David Armbrrecht
Kimerlee Billings
Kelly Billisko
Rachel Brehm
Bruce & Rebecca Brink
Madolyn T. Bryant
Mary Byrne
Anonymous
Sharon Clark
Ken & Lisa Cook
David & Marcia DeVos
Ben & Lisa Doctor

SUPPORT CIRCLE

Michael & Nancy Dodge
Joan Dyer
Phil Mary Ernvall
Stephen French
Anonymous
Jim Fues
Dakota Glassburn
Gerald Gurney
Susan Haveman
Thomas Herman
Holly Huber
Tracy Kapenga
Bill & Jeanne Kendrick
Christopher Klein
Robert & Sharon Knapp
Michele Koenes
Victoria Larson
Amy McDuffee
Ashlee & Allison McGreevy
Leslie Morant
Linda Morin
Terri Mulligan
Gene & Sharon Panozzo
Francine Paolini
Janet Peterson

Ed Reed
Robert Read
Thomas & Karen Roth
Gerri Riemenschneider
Mary Ann Sheline
Stephen Shoemaker
Gretchen Sills
Dud & Marty Smith
Sharon Van Dam
Lou Vanderhave
In Memory of Sharyl Brown
Sue Vandyke
Sharonetta Wells
Donna White
Keith & Kathy Wolverton
Roger Zinnecker

THANK YOU

Your generous donations have enabled Circle Theatre to continue to bring high quality plays, musicals, and children's theatre to West Michigan. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your continued support of local performing arts.

CIRCLETHEATRE.ORG/DONATE

**SIMPLIFIED
MARKETING +
WEB DESIGN**

connecting **business** with **community**

616.275.2810
intellectualninjas.com



intellectual
NINJAS
digital marketing + development

GRAND
OPERA

October 13 & 14, 2023

The Abduction
from the Seraglio

W.A. Mozart

2023
2024
SEASON

CONTEM
PORARY
OPERA

February 9 & 10, 2024

The Tibetan Book
of the Dead

Ricky Ian Gordon

GRAND
OPERA

April 19 & 20, 2024

La Bohème

Giacomo Puccini



operagr.org

ABOUT
MA
RAINEY'S
BLACK
BOTTOM

AUGUST WILSON



Born on April 27, 1945, August Wilson grew up in Pittsburgh's predominantly African American neighborhood, the Hill District, which had a profound influence on his work. Inspired from personal experiences and stories of the people around him, Wilson launched his mission to capture the struggles and triumphs of the African American Community throughout the 20th century.

Wilson's most notable achievement came with the creation of the Pittsburgh Cycle, also known as the Century Cycle, a series of ten plays set in a different decade of the 20th century to portray the African American experience in various eras. *Fences*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* are the most notable plays. Other plays included in the Century Cycle are *Gem of the Ocean*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *Jitney*, *King Hedley*, *Radio Golf*, *Seven Guitars*, and *Two Trains Running*. All of these plays, except for *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, take place in Pittsburgh's Hill District.

GERTRUDE “MA” RAINEY



Often referred to as the “Mother of Blues,” Gertrude “Ma” Rainey was a trailblazing African American blues singer and songwriter. Born on April 26, 1886, Ma’s birth name was Gertrude Pridgett. At 14, she made her debut with a performance at the Springer Opera House. After marrying Will “Pa” Rainey, the two started touring as “Rainey and Rainey, Assassins of The Blues.

Divorcing after 12 years, Ma continued using her stage name for the remainder of her career, which skyrocketed in the South as a solo performer. She signed with Paramount Records in 1923, which made her one of the first African American Blues singers to get a recording contract. Recording over 92 songs with Paramount, some of her hits were “Prove It On Me Blues” and “Black Eye Blues.” Ma was posthumously inducted into the Blue’s Foundation Hall of Fame in 1983, and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990.

THE LANGUAGE IN MA RAINIE



The language used in the play captures the essence of the African American experience during that period. August Wilson employs authentic vernacular and dialects, including the use of the N-word, to create a vivid and realistic portrayal of the characters and the social context they inhabit.

Using colloquial language highlights the racial tension and discrimination prevalent in the 1920s. It reflects the pervasive racism and degradation that African Americans faced during this era. The language used by the characters reveals their hardships and anger.

Wilson's intentional inclusion of the N-word in the dialogue also sparks a broader conversation about the power dynamics of language. By presenting the word in its historical context, he forces his audience to confront the discomfiting realities of racism and the lasting impact of racial slurs. While some may find the language offensive or controversial, it remains essential to the play's authenticity.

MA RAINNEY & INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

TERMS TO KNOW

Racism: A belief or attitude that discriminates and oppresses an individual or group based on their racial or ethnic background.

Institutional Racism: The systemic practices within organizations and institutions that discriminates against certain racial or ethnic groups that result in inequality.

Explicit Institutional Racism: Deliberate discriminatory actions, policies, or practices within social institutions resulting in systemic discrimination and disparities for certain racial or ethnic groups.

Implicit Institutional Racism: Subtle biases and practices without overtly intending to discriminate within social institutions that contribute to unequal treatment. Ma Rainey's band members ask to be paid by cash because it was nearly impossible for African Americans to cash a check at the bank due to implicit institutional racism.

The music industry was no exception to institutional racism. Due to commercial radio in the early 1900s, the music business began to struggle. In 1920 Mamie Smith, an African American artist, put out a record selling more than 100,000 copies. This led to the discovery of how profitable African American music can be. Unfortunately, African American artists rarely received compensation for their work as opposed to the white musicians. Al Jolson, a white jazz artist who would perform in blackface, was worth \$10,000 per record. Ma on the other hand, was compensated \$200, with her producers wanting to reduce her pay to \$100 which led to her quitting the music industry.

AMERICA IN 1920



The Roaring Twenties was characterized by exuberance and innovation with a booming economy and lively cultural scene. The end of World War I saw a rise in consumerism, urbanization and technological advancements that fueled the decade's distinctive spirit. However, this was also a period of contradictions with Prohibition's consequences, the Red Scare's anxieties, and the devastating impact of the stock market crash.

The 18th Amendment, also known as Prohibition, was ratified, which prohibited the sale, production, and distribution of alcoholic beverages. This Amendment intended to promote temperance and curb social issues related to alcohol. However, many unintended consequences arose, such as increased illegal production and distribution of alcohol that led to organized crime and speakeasies. This challenged the government in its attempts to regulate personal behavior.

Fears of communism and radical ideologies drove the Red Scare. There was a concern about the spread of communism throughout the United States because of the Russian Revolution and the emergence of the Soviet Union. These fears led to government raids and arrests of those suspected of being communists.

In 1929 the exuberant spirit of the decade came crashing down with the stock market crash, leading to the Great Depression. The sudden collapse of stock prices triggered a devastating economic downturn that led to financial failures, bank closures, and widespread unemployment. The 1929 crash marked the beginning of a decade-long economic downturn that profoundly affected American society.

CHICAGO IN 1927



The Great Migration was a mass movement of African Americans leaving their homes in the South for Northern cities like Chicago. With the rise of industrialization, there were more promising job prospects. African Americans sought refuge from the violent and discriminatory environment at home in the South, leading to the decision to migrate North. Once in Chicago, the majority settled down on the south side.

Although there were newfound opportunities through this Great Migration, there were still obstacles to be faced by those who migrated. Racial tensions, discriminatory housing practices, and limited access to suitable employment persisted even in the North. The promise of a better life often collided with the harsh reality that African Americans were still facing.

The social and racial tensions increased due to a tragic incident on July 27, 1919. An African American teen, Eugene Williams, was swimming in Lake Michigan when he drifted into a whites-only swimming area. A white beachgoer started throwing stones at him, eventually causing Williams to drown. The police never arrested the man responsible, further angering the African American community. This resulted in a week-long riot, where 38 people died and hundreds of others were injured.

THE BLUES



The Blues emerged in the African American communities of the Southern United States after the Civil War. Based on the experience of African Americans living in the post-slavery era, the blues served as a powerful form of artistic expression that often conveyed a deep emotional range with lyrics reflecting on the ability to overcome hard luck and adversity.

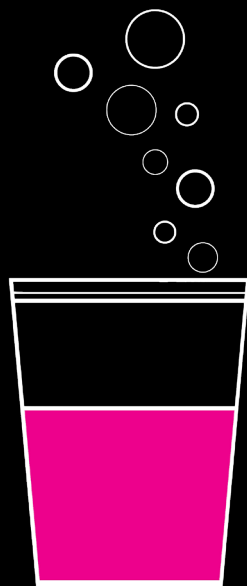
During the Great Depression, sales for Blues records sank, which led to the music style migrating North to cities like Detroit and Chicago. This led to the start of the Urban Blues, combining a mix of various regional musical styles into a polished and sophisticated sound.

The Urban Blues led to the development of new musical styles. Previously, the verse form consisted of a single line repeated four times. With the emergence of the Urban Blues, the original format switched to an AAB form. This form, also known as a 12-bar, is when the notes are played or sung at a lower/flatter pitch, which produces a more expressive and melancholy sound.

LOBBY BAR

JOIN US ON THESE SELECT NIGHTS
WHEN WE SERVE CRAFT BEER & WINE
PRE-SHOW, INTERMISSION*
AND POST-SHOW.

ALL PROCEEDS BENEFIT CIRCLE THEATRE.



LOBBY BAR NIGHTS

- | | | |
|--------------|--|------------------------------|
| MAY 5 | 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE | *Sponsored by Arktos Meadery |
| JUNE 2 | | BLITHE SPIRIT |
| JULY 14 | | PIPPIN |
| JULY 17 | | THE BRITISH INVASION |
| JULY 24 | | BLUE COLLAR ROCK CONCERT |
| AUGUST 11 | | MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM |
| AUGUST 14 | | HITS OF THE '90S |
| AUGUST 21 | SONGS IN THE KEY OF STEVIE WONDER | |
| SEPTEMBER 8 | | SWEENEY TODD |
| SEPTEMBER 11 | | THE BRITISH INVASION |
| SEPTEMBER 18 | | BLUE COLLAR ROCK |

Bar opens 30 minutes before show-time.