**WHY THEATRE?**

At Center Theatre Group, we believe theatre creates an extraordinary connection between artists and audiences that only starts on our stages. Theatre creates the energy that feeds a city, a culture, and a society. Theatre reflects the community it serves.

You are part of our community.

Center Theatre Group is excited to share the power of live theatre with you. It is an art form that embodies all of the arts: performance, visual, creative movement, writing, music, video, and technology. Theatre weaves all of the arts together to tell stories about what it means to be a human being.

**The Audience**

Without you we wouldn’t be here. So even if it’s your first time sitting in the house, you are already the most important person in the room. Theatre is live. You see us, and we see you. So, laugh, think, and applaud. Everything is happening right in front of you!

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August Wilson, Playwright

Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson (April 27, 1945 – October 2, 2005) is one of the most influential writers in American theatre. He is best known for The American Century cycle, 10 plays that chronicle the African-American experience during each decade of the 20th century.

Wilson was named after his father, Frederick August Kittel—a German immigrant who was largely absent from his family’s life. His mother, Daisy Wilson Kittel, was left to raise six children on her own in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where many of Wilson’s plays were set. Wilson was biracial, but his cultural identity was firmly African-American.

When Wilson was a teenager, his mother remarried and the family moved to a predominantly white neighborhood where they faced much racial hostility. Wilson attended several different high schools, but threats and abuse drove him away. In the 10th grade, Wilson dropped out altogether after a history teacher, a black man he admired, accused him of plagiarizing an essay and gave him a failing grade. By the age of 15, Wilson chose the path of self-education, spending his days at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

After his father died in 1965, Frederick August Kittel, Jr. officially changed his name to August Wilson in honor of his mother. That same year, he purchased his first typewriter and began to write poetry.

Wilson’s series of plays made him one of America’s most celebrated dramatists and earned him numerous awards. In 2005, the Virginia Theatre on Broadway in New York was renamed the August Wilson Theatre, and in 2006, the African American Cultural Center of Greater Pittsburgh was renamed the August Wilson Center for African American Culture.

Phylicia Rashad, Director

Phylicia Rashad is an American actress and stage director who previously directed Immediate Family at the Taper, A Raisin in the Sun at the Kirk Douglas Theatre, and Wilson’s Joe Turner’s Come and Gone at the Taper. She also acted in Wilson’s The Sun Also Rises and 2004. She has appeared in many movies (most recently Creed) and on television (Empire, The Cosby Show).

Rashad recently told the Los Angeles Times why she loves directing Wilson’s work. “He writes about specific time, specific people and specific circumstances,” Rashad said. “And because he is a humanist, there is a universality in all of his writings.”

The blues is a musical form that can be traced back to African rhythms, African-American slave songs, spirituals, and dance tunes known as “jump-ups.” Blues songs are songs of struggle and despair. For Wilson, the philosophies in the music teach his characters how to live their lives. Wilson first heard the blues in 1965. Bessie Smith’s recording of “Nobody In Town Can Make Me Like Mine” resonated deeply if “expressing something of myself. It said, this is yours.” The blues showed him that he had a song worth singing, that his life and his community “were worthy of the highest celebration and occasion of art.”

Most African-American performers in the 1920s—and indeed, for much of the 20th century—were exploited by white record labels, producers, and even artists who profited thanks to their talent and creativity. Ma Rainey was known as a shrewd businesswoman. At the height of her popularity in the 1920s she was making $2,000 a week—that would be about $25,000 today. What did she have to do to earn what she felt she was worth? What about the artists who weren’t able to succeed in getting paid fairly for their work? Wilson explores how this exploitation left many feeling robbed of their voice and worth.

In the following scene, the band members are in a heated discussion about their race and their worth.

TOLEDO: You lucky they let us be an entertainer. They ain’t got to accept your way of entertaining. You lucky and don’t even know it. You’re entertaining and the rest of the people is hauling wood. That’s the only kind of job for the colored man.

SLOW DRAG: Ain’t nothing wrong with hauling wood. I done hauled plenty wood. My daddy used to haul wood. Ain’t nothing wrong with that. That’s honest work.

LEVEE: That ain’t what I’m talking about. I ain’t talking about hauling no wood. I’m talking about being satisfied with a bone somebody threw you...

TOLEDO: We done sold Africa for the price of tomatoes. We done sold ourselves to the white man in order to be like him. We trying to be just like him. We done sold who we are in order to be like him. Ain’t nothing wrong with that. That’s honest work.

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TOLEDO: We done sold Africa for the price of tomatoes. We done sold ourselves to the white man in order to be like him. Look at the way you dressed… That ain’t African. That’s the white man. We trying to be just like him. We done sold who we are in order to become someone else. We’s imitation white men.

CUTLER: What else we gonna be, living over here?

TOLEDO: What else we gonna be, living over here?

LEVEE: I’m Levee. Just me. I ain’t no imitation nothing!

SLOW DRAG: You can’t change who you are by how you dress. That’s what I got to say.

TOLEDO: It ain’t all how you dress. It’s how you act, how you see the world. It’s how you follow life.

Have you ever felt like you had to change a part of yourself to be successful or to be accepted?

How do you measure your worth and the worth of others?