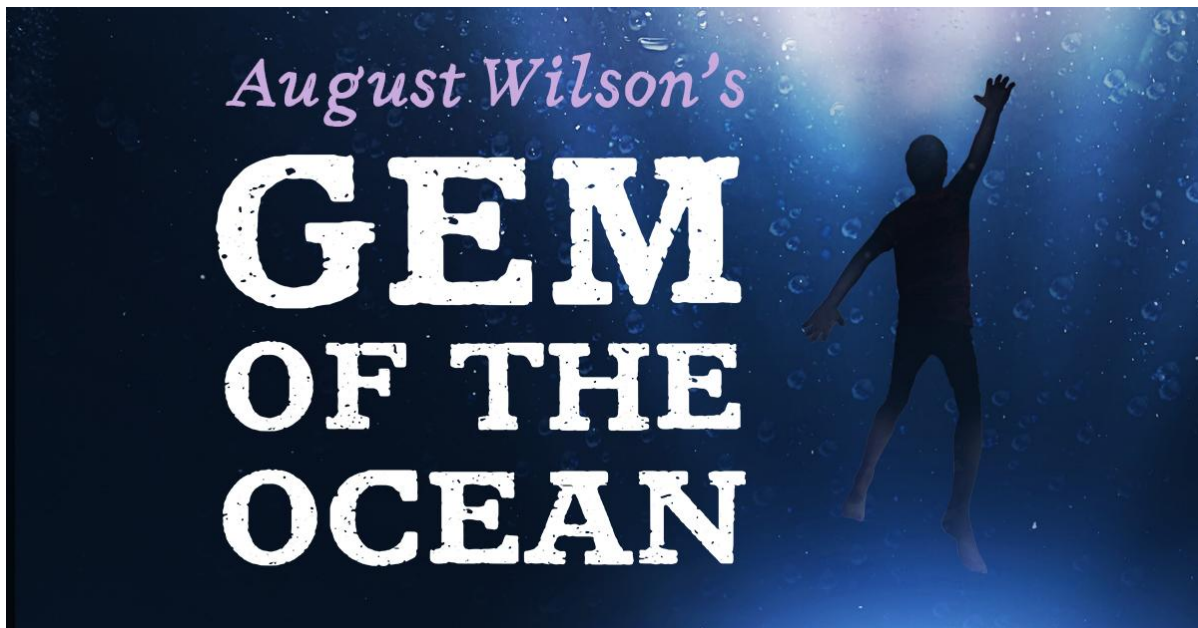


**PORTLAND  
CENTER STAGE  
AT THE ARMORY**

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Stand in the light with Pulitzer Prize-winning  
playwright August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean***



**Previews Begin Mar. 5 | Opening Night is Mar. 11 | Closes Apr. 3**  
[REQUEST PRESS TICKETS](#)

**February 4, 2022 — PORTLAND, OR.** Portland Center Stage brings the work of one of the most pivotal voices in theater, and a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, to the stage with August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean*. Previews begin on March 5, opening night is March 11, and performances run through April 3, 2022, on The Armory's U.S. Bank Main Stage. Tickets are on sale now.

Associate Artistic Director Chip Miller takes the helm once again, directing an all-local cast that includes Bobby Bermea, WRICK Jones, Isaac Lamb, Treasure Lunan, Victor Mack, Henry Noble, Andrea Vernae, Victoria Alvarez-Chacon, and Justin Wilson.

“The opportunity to interpret the work of August Wilson feels like a major rite of passage,” said Miller. “The first time I ever saw a stage full of black people was in a production of *Two Trains Running* when I was in middle school. The chance to investigate Wilson’s work with this smart and fierce group of collaborators is like hitting the jackpot,” they continued. “I am very excited to get into the room and explore the world of Aunt Ester, to more deeply understand the spirituality in this play, and to wrestle with the ideas of what it means to actually face yourself.”

August Wilson’s *Gem of the Ocean* is the first play, chronologically, of Wilson’s Pittsburgh Cycle, a collection of 10 plays that explores the heritage and experience of African Americans during each decade of the 20th century. Also known as the Century Cycle, Wilson penned the collection, a feat unrivaled in the theatrical canon, over the course of approximately 26 years. The cycle is primarily set in Pittsburgh’s Hill District — the historically Black neighborhood where Wilson was born and raised.

August Wilson’s *Gem of the Ocean* takes audiences to Aunt Ester Tyler’s home on 1839 Wylie Avenue, a sanctuary for lost souls where she is the purveyor, sharing the knowledge that truth and love are keys to making a person right with themselves. In the play, Wilson showcases the correlation between the past and the present and how they must coexist before one can “stand in the light,” as Aunt Ester says. Set in 1904, the play represents the first decade and beginning of the Pittsburgh Cycle, but it was written second-to-last in the collection. It premiered in 2003 at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago.

## **ABOUT THE PLAY**

August Wilson’s *Gem of the Ocean* is an iconic story of freedom, justice, and salvation from the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Fences*. Pittsburgh, 1904: Amidst boiling racial tensions, Citizen Barlow arrives at the home of Aunt Ester, a 285-year-old healer, who helps him seek redemption from a mistake that’s cost another man his life. She sends Citizen on a powerful, mystical journey to the City of Bones in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean — where he must understand

the past in order to forge his own future. “Wilson’s juiciest material. The play holds the stage and its characters hammer home, strongly, the notion of newfound freedom” (*Chicago Tribune*).

### **ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT**

August Wilson’s Pittsburgh Cycle includes *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 have garnered many awards, including Pulitzer Prizes for *Fences* (1987) and *The Piano Lesson* (1990); a Tony Award for *Fences* and a Tony nomination for *Gem of the Ocean*; Great Britain’s Olivier Award for *Jitney*; as well as eight New York Drama Critics Circle Awards. The cast recording of *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom* received a 1985 Grammy Award, and Wilson received a 1995 Emmy Award nomination for his screenplay adaptation of *The Piano Lesson*. Wilson’s early works include *The Janitor*, *Recycle*, *The Coldest Day of the Year*, *Malcolm X*, *The Homecoming*, and the musical satire *Black Bart and the Sacred Hills*. Wilson received many fellowships and awards, including Rockefeller and Guggenheim Fellowships in Playwriting, the Whiting Writers Award, a 2003 Heinz Award, a 1999 National Humanities Medal awarded by the president of the United States, and he 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 as The August Wilson Theatre.

### **THE CAST**

Treasure Lunan (*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*) takes on the role of spiritual advisor for the community as Aunt Ester Tyler. Lunan is joined by Bobby Bermea (*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*) as the local constable and Black Mary’s brother, Caesar Wilks; WRICK Jones (10 years at Oregon Shakespeare Festival) as the former Underground Railroad conductor Solly Two Kings; Isaac Lamb (*Tiny Beautiful Things*) as Rytherford Selig, a traveling peddler and frequent visitor of Aunt Ester’s; Victor Mack (*PROTOCOL: Episode 1*) in the role of Aunt Ester’s gatekeeper Eli; Henry Noble (*Ayano* at Ensemble Studio Theatre) as Citizen

Barlow; and Andrea Vernae (*School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*) as Aunt Ester's protégé, Black Mary. Victoria Alvarez-Chacon and Justin Wilson join the cast as understudies.

## THE CREATIVE TEAM

Director Chip Miller (*Hedwig and the Angry Inch*) is joined by Scenic Designer Lawrence E. Moten III (*Chicken & Biscuits* at Circle in the Square); Costume Designer Wanda Walden, Lighting Designer Marika Kent, and Sound Designer Phil Johnson (who all collaborated on *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* at PCS); Wig Designer Iran Micheal Leon (*Othello* at OSF); Dramaturg Kamilah Bush (PCS Literary Manager); Music Supervisor Coty Raven Morris (PSU's Asst. Prof. of Music Education and Social Justice); Dialect Coach Michael Morgan (UC Santa Barbara's Head of Voice and Speech); Stage Manager Mark Tynan (*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*); Assistant Stage Manager Kristina Mast (*Wild and Reckless*); Production Assistant Danny Rosales (*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*); and Assistant Director RaChelle Schmidt (PCS's Artistic Associate and IDEA Manager).

## TICKET AND PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

**When:** March 5 – April 3, 2022\*

\*Opening Night/Press Night: Friday, March 11, at 7:30 p.m.

Preview Performances: March 5, 6, 9 & 10 at 7:30 p.m.

Pay What You Will Performances: March 6 and March 31 at 7:30 p.m.

**Where:** U.S. Bank Main Stage at The Armory, 128 NW Eleventh Ave, Portland, OR.

**To Purchase Regular Tickets:** Prices range from \$25 to \$87 and tickets may be purchased at [pcs.org/august-wilsons-gem-of-the-ocean](https://pcs.org/august-wilsons-gem-of-the-ocean), 503.445.3700, or in-person from the box office.

*Prices vary by date and time and are subject to change.*

**Ticket Specials:** Visit [pcs.org/deals](https://pcs.org/deals) to view ticket specials, including Rush Tickets, Pay What You Will, Arts for All, Active Duty, Military Veteran, Student, Under 30, The Armory Card, Groups of 10+, and more.

**Please Note:** August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean* is recommended for ages 14 and up. It contains adult language and themes, smoking, theatrical haze, and strobe-like lighting effects. Learn

more by calling 503-445-3700.

**Accessibility:** Learn about accessibility options at [pcs.org/access](https://pcs.org/access).

## **PORTLAND CENTER STAGE**

[Portland Center Stage](https://pcs.org) was established in 1988 as a branch of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and became independent in 1994. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Marissa Wolf and Managing Director Cynthia Fuhrman, the company produces a mix of classic, contemporary, and world premiere productions, along with a variety of high-quality education and community programs. As part of its dedication to new play development, the company has produced 28 world premieres, many of which were developed at its JAW New Play Festival. Portland Center Stage's home is The Armory, a historic building originally constructed in 1891. After a major renovation, The Armory opened in 2006 as the first building on the National Register of Historic Places, the first performing arts venue in the country, and the first building in Portland to achieve a LEED Platinum rating.

**Portland Center Stage is committed to identifying and interrupting instances of racism and all forms of oppression, through the principles of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA). Learn more at [pcs.org/idea](https://pcs.org/idea).**

[Portland Center Stage's 2021-2022 season](https://pcs.org) is funded in part by Season Superstars the Regional Arts and Culture Council and the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation; Season Sponsors the Oregon Arts Commission, a state agency funded by the state of Oregon and the National Endowment for the Arts, and US Bank; and Producing Sponsors Ellyn Bye, Ray and Bobbi Davis, Jess Dishman, Ronni Lacroute, Mark Spencer, Argyle Winery, and Deschutes Brewery.

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