



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Blues Theater announces its 2016-2017 Season
Including the World Premiere of *TRANSit* by Artistic Affiliate Darren Canady, directed by Lisa Portes; the Chicago Premieres of *Beauty's Daughter* by Dael Orlandersmith, directed by Ron OJ Parson and *The Columnist* by David Auburn, directed by Keira Fromm; the 15th annual production of *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* from Frank Capra's film, directed by Gwendolyn Whiteside and *Dutchman* by Amiri Baraka, directed by Chuck Smith

Chicago, IL— **American Blues Theater**, under the continued leadership of Producing Artistic Director **Gwendolyn Whiteside**, announces the lineup for its 2016 – 2017 Season, "Define Yourself." American Blues' 31st Season will include the World Premiere of *TRANSit* by Artistic Affiliate **Darren Canady**, directed by **Lisa Portes**; the Chicago Premieres of *Beauty's Daughter* by **Dael Orlandersmith**, directed by **Ron OJ Parson** and *The Columnist* by **David Auburn**, directed by **Keira Fromm**; the 15th annual production of *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* from **Frank Capra's** film, directed by **Gwendolyn Whiteside** and *Dutchman* by **Amiri Baraka**, directed by **Chuck Smith**.

"Lauded American poet Robert Frost wrote, 'Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life; define yourself.' The unforgettable characters in our Season 31 productions heed this advice," notes Producing Artistic Director **Gwendolyn Whiteside**. "They boldly claim their space in our imaginations and our stage. Our audiences will meet Amiri Baraka's iconic "Clay" in *Dutchman*, a fierce woman named "Veronica" in our world-premiere commission *TRANSit*, the real-life syndicated newspaper journalists Joe and Stewart Alsop in Pulitzer Prize winner David Auburn's *The Columnist*, "Diane" who depicts 6 other characters in the Obie Award-winning play *Beauty's Daughter* and Frank Capra's beloved "George Bailey". With Season 31, we hope these strong and courageous characters inspire our audiences to explore their own identity."

Season 31 features Ensemble Members **Manny Buckley, Dara Cameron, Austin Cook, Jaclyn Holsey, Michael Mahler, John Mohrlein, Sarah E. Ross, and Gwendolyn Whiteside** with Artistic Affiliates **Darren Canady, Ian Paul Custer, Paul Deziel, Elyse Dolan, Shawn Goudie, Sarah Hughey, James Joseph, Zach Kenney, Kathryn Lochert, Eric Lynch, Christopher J. Neville, Camille Robinson, Grant Sabin and Wandachristine**.

The 2016-17 American Blues Theater Season up close:
An Evening of One-Acts featuring *Dutchman* and *TRANSit*

Chicago Revival of
Dutchman

By Amiri Baraka
Directed by Chuck Smith

AND

The World Premiere of
TRANSit

By Artistic Affiliate Darren Canady
Directed by Lisa Portes

August 26 – September 25, 2016

Press Opening: September 1, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

Experience two explosive plays in one event. First see *Dutchman*—one of the most important plays in 20th-century culture to take on race relations. Then, inspired by Baraka's pivotal work, watch the world-premiere commission *TRANSit*. New York City Transit: humanity's great collision place. One hot summer night, Veronica finds herself drawn to a sensitive, unpredictable street performer aboard a subway train. The rhythms of their encounter reveal more than either had planned, and soon an explosive mix of identity, sex, and betrayal is unleashed.

**15th Anniversary Production of
*It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!***

From Frank Capra's film

Directed by Producing Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside

November 18 – December 31, 2016

Press Opening: November 20, 2016 at 2:30 p.m.

For 15 years, the American Blues Ensemble has treated Chicago audiences to a live 1940s radio broadcast of holiday favorite *It's a Wonderful Life*. The incredible cast recreates the entire town of Bedford Falls with Foley sound effects, an original score and holiday carols. The Bedford Falls "residents" extend their hospitality after every performance when audiences are treated to milk and cookies served by the cast.

The Chicago Premiere of

The Columnist

By David Auburn

Directed by Keira Fromm

February 17 – April 19, 2017

Press Opening: February 23, 2017 at 7:30 p.m.

From the Pulitzer and Tony award-winning author of *Proof* comes a drama about power, the press, sex and betrayal. At the height of the Cold War, Joe Alsop is the nation's most influential journalist, beloved, feared and courted by the Washington world. But as the 60s dawn and America undergoes dizzying change, the intense political dramas Joe is embroiled in become deeply personal as well.

The Chicago Premiere of

Beauty's Daughter

By Dael Orlandersmith

Directed by Ron OJ Parson

June 2 – July 2, 2017

Press Opening: June 8, 2017 at 7:30 p.m.

This Obie Award-winning play by Dael Orlandersmith depicts one woman's journey through life's obstacles in an East Harlem neighborhood. Artistic Affiliate Wandachristine takes on 6 different characters during the course of this solo play—some broken, some on the way down, but all memorable.

Additional 2016-2017 Programming

Ripped: The Living Newspaper Festival

Spring 2017

Written and direction by various Chicago artists

Since 2009, American Blues Theater has produced 115 short plays in the *RIPPED: the Living Newspaper* series. Based on the 1930's WPA era program that brought Orson Welles, Arthur Miller, Richard Wright and Clifford Odets into public attention, playwrights use inspiration ripped from today's headlines to create stories performed live on stage.

Arts Education in Chicago Public Schools

The Lincoln Project

Conceived and Adapted by Producing Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside from Artistic Affiliate James Still's Pulitzer-nominated *The Heavens Are Hung in Black*

American Blues Theater's innovative and adaptive program aligns with Illinois Core Curriculum standards to engage 5th-10th graders about the life of Abraham Lincoln, specifically the events surrounding the "Emancipation Proclamation." Students read Still's script and the American Blues Theater study guide, watch scenes using professional actors, and participate in discussions. As part of this program, students

also write and perform scenes inspired from current events. Since the program's launch in 2013, over 3,500 students have participated in the program.

Subscriptions

All main stage performances take place at the **Greenhouse Theater Center**, 2257 N. Lincoln Ave. FlexPasses for the 2016-2017 season are available now at www.AmericanBluesTheater.com or by calling **312.725.4228**.

About American Blues Theater

American Blues Theater is the premier American theater producing visceral theatrical works while engaging its audience in missions of local service agencies. **American Blues Theater illuminates the American ideas of freedom, equality, and opportunity in the plays produced and communities served.**

The multi-generational and interdisciplinary artists have established the second-oldest professional Equity Ensemble theater in Chicago. The 38-member Ensemble has 530 combined years of collaboration on stage. As of 2016, the theater and artists received 172 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and over 28 Black Theatre Alliance Awards. The artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards and numerous other accolades.

The American Blues Theater Ensemble includes all four Founders Ed Blatchford, Rick Cleveland, James Leaming, and William Payne with Dawn Bach, Matthew Brumlow, Manny Buckley, Kate Buddeke, Sarah Burnham, Dara Cameron, Casey Campbell, Brian Claggett, Dennis Cockrum, Austin Cook, Laura Coover, Lauri Dahl, Kristin Dei Tos, Joe Foust, Tom Geraty, Cheryl Graeff, Marty Higginbotham, Jaclyn Holsey, Lindsay Jones, Samantha Jones, Nambi E. Kelley, Kevin R. Kelly, Steve Key, Ed Kross, Warren Levon, Michael Mahler, Kelli Marino, Heather Meyers, John Mohrlein, Suzanne Petri, Carmen Roman, Editha Rosario, Sarah E. Ross and Gwendolyn Whiteside.

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