The World of August Wilson + The Black Creative Voice

We're so glad you’re joining us for the first installment in Court’s Theatre & Thought series: The World of August Wilson + The Black Creative Voice. In this conversational, intimate look at August Wilson and the American Century Cycle, Dr. Kenneth Warren and Resident Artist Ron OJ Parson will examine how one of America’s most essential classic playwrights has been influenced by and impacted generations of Black artists.

On the date of each session, you will receive a digital access link via email with login instructions.

You will be able to access all August Wilson sessions following their release date for up to 60 days.

You will not need to download any special software in order to access digital content – only an internet-enabled device with a web browser.

QUESTIONs? Call our Box Office at (773) 753-4472.

Q&A

Following each session, participants are invited to engage in a live Q&A. If you would like to participate, make sure you attend the live sessions at 7pm on the dates listed above.
DR. KENNETH WARREN’s scholarship and teaching focuses on American and African American literature from the late nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth century. Professor Warren is particularly interested in the way that debates about literary form and genre articulate with discussions of political and social change. His single-authored books, which include What Was African American Literature? (Harvard 2010), So Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism (Chicago, 2003), and Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism (Chicago, 1993), explore how American literature by black and white writers helped consolidate, and subsequently responded to, Jim Crow America. Professor Warren is also a coeditor of two books, Renewing Black Intellectual History: The Material and Ideological Foundations of African America Thought (Paradigm 2010) and Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs (Georgia 2013). His articles have also appeared in Boston Review, The Los Angeles Review of Books, and Jacobin. At the University of Chicago, the various courses he teaches reflect his interest in genre, the politics of race, and the relation of culture to politics.

HONEY CRAWFORD is the Harper-Schmidt Fellow and Collegiate Assistant Professor in TAPS at UChicago. Her research interests include global feminisms, critical race theory, public spectacle, and protest. She specializes in Afro Brazilian cultural performance as both a scholar and practitioner, exploring intersections between ritual performance and self-making through a repertoire that includes carnival, media activism, radical theatre, and the performance of everyday life. She earned her PhD in theatre studies from Cornell University in 2017 where she was also a New York Public Humanities Fellow. Dr. Crawford is currently developing her dissertation into her book manuscript, Negra Demais! Overwhelming Performances of Afro Brazilian Femininity. This project takes an interdisciplinary approach, positioning women-driven spectacles of black consciousness in the 20th-21st century against prevalent discourse on the black diaspora and performance studies. Paying close attention to theatrical traditions that press against the bounds of propriety and indulge in an aesthetic of abundance, this book identifies a preoccupation with the transgressive potential held in performances of black feminine power.

RON OJ PARSON hails from Buffalo, New York and is a graduate of the University of Michigan’s professional theatre program. He is a Resident Artist at Court Theatre, former co-founder and artistic director of the Onyx Theatre Ensemble, and co-founder of the Beyond the Stage Theatre Project. Ron is a company member of TimeLine Theatre, and associate artist at Writers Theatre and Teatro Vista. At Court Theatre, Ron directed Fences, Gem
of the Ocean, Seven Guitars, Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom, The Piano Lesson, and Jitney by August Wilson; The Mountaintop by Katori Hall; Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett; Sizwe Banzi is Dead by Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona; Blues for an Alabama Sky and Flyin’ West by Pearl Cleage; and Home by Samm-Art Williams, among others. In Chicagoland, Ron has worked with Black Ensemble Theatre, eta Creative Arts Foundation, Chicago Dramatists, Congo Square, Oak Park Theatre Festival, Goodman, Victory Gardens, Northlight, Chicago Dramatists, Urban Theater Company, Steppenwolf, and City Lit Theatre. Regional theatres include American Players Theatre, Virginia Stage Company, Portland Stage, Studio Arena Theatre, Roundabout, Studio Theatre (DC), Baltimore Center Stage, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Pittsburgh Public Theater, Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre, Geva, Signature, The Alliance Theatre, South Coast Rep, Kansas City Repertory, and Pasadena Playhouse, among others. In Canada, Ron directed the world premiere of Palmer Park at the Stratford Festival. Ron is a member of SAG-AFTRA, SDC, and Actors Equity.

JOEL RHONE is a PhD student at the University of Chicago. Joel earned his BA from Howard University in 2016, and after winning the Marshall Scholarship he received an MA from the University of Manchester in 2017. His research interests include historical fiction, diaspora studies, and Black writers in exile. More broadly, he studies the performance of solidarity in African American letters. Joel was awarded honorable mention for the Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellowship in 2019, and serves as an admissions assistant with UChicago GRAD.

SANDRA G. SHANNON is Professor of African American Literature in the Department of English at Howard University. She is a leading scholar on the works of playwright August Wilson with titles such as The Dramatic Vision of August Wilson and August Wilson’s Fences: A Reference Guide to her credit. She coedited the essay collection August Wilson and Black Aesthetic and is completing her work as coeditor of the forthcoming MLA Approaches to Teaching series volume Approaches to Teaching the Plays of August Wilson. Dr. Shannon has most recently published “An Intimate Look at Lynn Nottage,” which appeared along with an in-depth interview of the playwright in the collection, Contemporary African American Women Playwrights. She is also the author of “Women Playwrights Who Cross Cultural Borders”, which appears in the 2013 edition of The Cambridge Companion to African American Theatre. Dr. Shannon was part of an NEH award-winning team that will produced the PBS American Masters documentary on August Wilson in 2014. She was named a Fulbright Specialist and won a grant from the U. S. State Department to travel to Botswana to do archival research on the written correspondences of the country’s most influential writer, the late Bessie Head. Dr. Shannon is the editor of the College Language Association Journal.
Deepen Your Experience

Want to deepen your relationship with the material in The World of August Wilson + The Black Creative Voice? Explore the following options for increasing your understanding and appreciation of the artists and academics bringing this Theatre & Thought series to life.

LISTEN:
Sandra Shannon discusses Wilson's life and work in this episode of “Against the Grain” for 94.1 KPFA. https://kpfa.org/episode/72874/

READ:
“Pittsburgh’s Place Within August Wilson’s World.” Learn more about Pittsburgh’s role in Wilson’s ten-play cycle in this interview with Laurence Glasco, an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the University of Pittsburgh. https://www.courttheatre.org/about/blog/pittsburghs-place-within-august-wilsons-world/

“August Wilson’s Century Cycle.” Haven’t read or seen all of the plays in August Wilson’s Century Cycle? This quick primer gives you an overview of each of Wilson’s ten plays. https://www.courttheatre.org/about/blog/august-wilsons-century-cycle/


“The Ground on Which I Stand.” Read the speech delivered by August Wilson on June 26, 1996, at the 11th biennial Theatre Communications Group national conference. https://www.americantheatre.org/2016/06/20/the-ground-on-which-i-stand/

WATCH:
Established in 2018 to honor Founding Artistic Director Nicholas Rudall, this award acknowledges an artist with a passion for and dedication to classic plays. Kelvin Roston, Jr. joins previous recipients Kate Fry and Allen Gilmore as a shining example of an artist upholding Rudall’s vision for classic theatre’s capacity to pose enduring and provocative questions that define the human experience.

“There aren’t words that can adequately express how completely overwhelmed and honored I felt when I received the news,” says Kelvin Roston, Jr. “It feels incredible to have your peers enjoy your work.”

“Kelvin is masterful at making stories resonate with contemporary audiences thanks to his passion, intelligence, and extraordinary range as an actor,” says Charles Newell, Marilyn F. Vitale Artistic Director. “I know Nick would have been dazzled by Kelvin’s towering portrayals of two such different kings, Hedley and Oedipus.”

Clare Lorring, Nicholas Rudall’s daughter, shared, “I am thrilled to hear about Kelvin as the recipient of the Nick Rudall award. He is a kind, thoughtful, and brilliant actor, and I know my dad would have been glad for Kelvin to receive this honor. I look forward to being able to see Kelvin at Court in the future.”

Kelvin will play the title role in Court’s spring 2021 production of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Read an interview with Kelvin here.

*Photo of Kelvin Roston, Jr. in King Hedley II (Brosilow).*