

NAMBI E. KELLEY MAKES HER DIRECTING DEBUT WITH “A RAISIN IN THE SUN” AT THEATREWORKS

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COLORADO SPRINGS—After celebrated work as a playwright (“Red Rain/First Woman” with Lincoln Center Director’s Lab, “Native Son” and “Jabari Dreams of Freedom”) and actor (with credits at Steppenwolf Theatre, Goodman Theatre and South Coast Repertory), Nambi E. Kelley returns to Theatreworks to make her directing debut with Lorraine Hansberry’s classic, “A Raisin in the Sun.” The play opens Sept. 27 at the Dusty Loo Bon Vivant Theater in the Ent Center for the Arts on the University of Colorado Colorado Springs campus.

Kelley was raised in Chicago in Hansberry’s neighborhood and attended the same grammar school (where she was taught the playwright’s work). She feels a special connection to the play, having experienced firsthand both the suffocation of the neighborhood and a sense of aspiration and hope sparked by learning Hansberry’s work at a young age.

“We know our play is about dreams deferred. Lorraine carefully and explicitly lays out the dreams of each character in the first scene of the play,” said Kelley. “Our production focuses on the seed of each of those dreams and how each dream is trying to break free from the shell holding it back from fruition. I want to witness those seeds in various stages of the birthing process, with a focus on the incubation/suffocation period of dreams.”

Kelley is the first Black woman to direct for Theatreworks. In a time when equity and authenticity of representation are at the forefront of national dialogue, she has assembled not only a wonderful cast, but also a design team composed of outstanding artists of color. The production’s artistic team includes Lawrence E. Moten III (Scenic Designer), Kathy A. Perkins (Lighting Designer), Naila Aladdin Sanders (Costume Designer) and David Samba (Sound Designer).

“A Raisin in the Sun” focuses on the story of the Younger family, played by local favorite Lynne Hastings (Lena Younger), Caren Blackmore (Ruth Younger), Al-nisa Petty (Beneatha Younger), Rashid Kamara (Travis Younger) and Calvin M. Thompson (Walter Lee Younger). This is Thompson’s fourth time on the Theatreworks stage—he was last seen as Floyd “Schoolboy” Barton in the 2013 production of “Seven Guitars.” His national credits include work at The Labyrinth Theatre, The Flea Theatre and Aurora Theatre.

Tickets are on sale at tickets.uccspresents.org or through the UCCS Presents Box Office at (719) 255-3232. “A Raisin In the Sun” runs Sept. 27–Oct. 21.

ASSOCIATED EVENTS

On Sept. 30, before the Sunday matinee, General Irv Halter, who serves as Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Local Affairs, will be joined by Colorado artists and developers for a panel discussion on gentrification, housing, and the arts. This discussion is part of the annual Prologue lecture series, co-presented by Theatreworks and the UCCS Theatre and Dance Program.

There will be an additional Prologue event on Oct. 21 with distinguished guest Stephanie Ybarra, who will address “A Raisin in the Sun,” Theatreworks’ upcoming production of “Lysistrata” and gender in the theater. As Director of Special Projects at The Public Theater in New York City, Ybarra leads the Mobile Unit program, which performs free Shakespeare plays across the city in prisons, homeless shelters and community centers.

Theatreworks will host Community Conversations with artists, scholars and community leaders after the Saturday and Sunday matinee performances throughout the run of the play.