

A Raisin in the Sun

by Lorraine Hansberry

Directed by Lou Bellamy

Co-produced with

The Cleveland Play House and Arizona Theatre Company

Presented by RBC Wealth Management

March 13 through April 11, 2009

Preview March 12

INTRODUCTION

Penumbra Theatre Company is honored to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Lorraine Hansberry's Broadway premiere of *A Raisin in the Sun* with a special presentation at The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

When *A Raisin in the Sun* premiered on Broadway, it played to riveted audiences. A benchmark in American theatre, the production was the first of a play written by a black playwright, directed by a black director, and featuring an all-black principal cast. It won the New York Drama Critics Award and was hailed by critics. Revisiting the play in 2008 gives us the opportunity to contemplate our progress and lack thereof in relation to awareness and action around race and social justice.

Lorraine Hansberry was born May 19, 1930 in Chicago, Illinois the youngest of four children. Her father was a real estate broker who supported the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League. Her mother was a schoolteacher and a local community activist. Her masterpiece, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is based on the true story of her family's struggle with purchasing a home in an all-white community outside of Chicago. The situation escalated to a Supreme Court trial *Hansberry v. Lee* in which the restrictive covenants that protected the segregated neighborhood were deemed unconstitutional. While the play never reaches this historical apex, the Hansberry's spent years subjected to racially motivated threats and violence as the sole African American members of a previously all-white community.

Throughout her life, Lorraine Hansberry was fiercely dedicated to human rights activism and the struggle for equality and Civil Rights in America. Her other writing includes *To Be Young, Gifted and Black*, *Les Blancs*, *The Drinking Gourd*, and *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*.

Her bright and important career was cut short by pancreatic cancer, to which Hansberry succumbed on January 12, 1965 at the age of thirty-four. To this day, she is regarded as one of the most important voices in the American theatre landscape and she is owed special acknowledgement for her role in depicting authentic, socially responsible representations of African American life onstage.