“Theater, as a powerful conveyer of human values, has often led us through the impossible landscape of American class, regional and racial conflicts, providing fresh insights and fragile but enduring bridges of fruitful dialogue. It has provided us with a mirror that forces us to face personal truths and enables us to discover within ourselves an indomitable spirit that recognizes, sometimes across wide social barriers, those common concerns that make possible genuine cultural fusion.”

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Radio Golf is the last play written by renowned playwright August Wilson, and the last play in his ten-part American Century Cycle.
- This production of Radio Golf was directed by Gregg Daniel at A Noise Within.

AUGUST WILSON

August Wilson (1945–2005) was born Frederick August Kittel Jr. to a Black mother named Daisy Wilson and a white German immigrant father named Frederick August Kittel. His father was largely absent, and in 1958 Daisy Wilson married a Black man, David Bedford.


Over the course of his playwriting career, August Wilson won seven New York Drama Critics’ Circle Awards for Best Play, held Guggenheim and Rockefeller fellowships, and won two Pulitzer Prizes, for Fences and The Piano Lesson.

AUGUST WILSON’S AMERICAN CENTURY CYCLE

August Wilson’s American Century Cycle is made up of ten plays about Black American life, each set in a different decade of the twentieth century. All of them except for Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom (which is set in Chicago) are set in the Hill District of Pittsburgh, where August Wilson grew up. Wilson did not have plans for a ten-part cycle when he started writing these plays, which might explain why they were not written in chronological order.

- Gem of the Ocean (2003)—set in 1904
- Joe Turner’s Come and Gone (1986)—set in 1911
- Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom (1984)—set in 1927
- The Piano Lesson (1989)—set in 1937
- Seven Guitars (1995)—set in 1948
- Fences (1985)—set in 1957
- Two Trains Running (1990)—set in 1969
- Jitney (1982)—set in 1977
- King Hedley II (2001)—set in 1985
Radio Golf is the final play in the American Century Cycle and August Wilson’s final work. Set in Pittsburgh in 1997, Radio Golf premiered in 2005 at the Yale Repertory Theatre and had its Broadway premiere in 2007. Radio Golf won the 2007 New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Play and was nominated for multiple Tony awards.

In a 1991 interview, August Wilson said, “The one thing which we did not have as Black Americans—we didn’t have a mythology. We had no origin myths.” August Wilson wrote myths into the American Century Cycle—myths that characters tell and retell throughout the plays. The character Aunt Ester from Gem of the Ocean becomes a mythical figure in later plays. Her former home at 1839 Wylie Avenue plays a pivotal role in Radio Golf.

A Noise Within is a leading regional theatre producer based in Pasadena. They produce classic theatre with a mission “to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives.” The company is made up of resident and guest artists who perform plays that A Noise Within believes “will be part of our cultural legacy.”

In its 30-year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics’ Circle’s revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION
- What mythological threads or archetypes did you notice in Radio Golf?
- What is your or your family’s relationship to real estate? To neighborhood change?
- What moral values do the characters in Radio Golf hold? What shapes their values?
- A Noise Within produces plays with a mission to, in part, challenge individual perspectives. Was anything in your perspective challenged by this production? What was challenged? How did that expand your personal awareness?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:
- Other productions at A Noise Within anoisewithin.org
- Classes and performances at the USC School of Dramatic Arts dramaticarts.usc.edu
Upcoming Visions and Voices events, including
11/30/22 John Singleton: A Celebration—Shaft
1/23/23 John Singleton: A Celebration—Baby Boy
1/27–28/23 Losing Ground @ 40
2/1/23 SOUL 2023: Producing to Power in the 21st Century
2/15/23 A.I.M by Kyle Abraham: An Untitled Love

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

KELSEY VUKIC of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

BOOKS
- Mary L. Bogumil, Understanding August Wilson (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1999).

DATABASES
- Digital Theatre Plus
- Black Drama (Third Edition)
- North American Theatre Online (Alexander Street Drama)
- Audio Drama: The L.A. Theatre Works Collection
- Drama Online
- Performing Arts Periodicals Database
- Arts & Humanities Full Text

JOURNALS
- American Theatre
- Back Stage
- Contemporary Theatre Review
- Journal of American Drama and Theatre

STREAMING VIDEO
- August Wilson: Writing and the Blues (Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1988).
- In Black and White, episode 5 (California Newsreel, 1992).