

GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE  
*Producing Artistic Director*

**ENSEMBLE**

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MANNY BUCKLEY  
KATE BUDDEKE  
SARAH BURNHAM  
DARA CAMERON  
CASEY CAMPBELL  
BRIAN CLAGGETT  
RICK CLEVELAND  
DENNIS COCKRUM  
AUSTIN COOK  
LAURA COOVER  
LAURI DAHL  
KRISTIN DEITOS  
JOE FOUST  
TOM GERATY  
CHERYL GRAEFF  
MARTY HIGGINBOTHAM  
JACLYN HOLSEY  
LINDSAY JONES  
SAMANTHA C. JONES  
NAMBI E. KELLEY  
KEVIN R. KELLY  
STEVE KEY  
ED KROSS  
JAMES LEAMING  
WARREN LEVON  
MICHAEL MAHLER  
KELLI MARINO  
HEATHER MEYERS  
JOHN MÖHRLEIN  
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GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE

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*in memoriam*

1016 N. DEARBORN STREET  
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\*Media passes, photographs, videos, interviews and additional materials may be available upon request.

**AMERICAN BLUES THEATER'S 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY "SEEING IS BELIEVING" SEASON  
INCLUDES A RAINMAKER REVIVAL, A CHICAGO PREMIERE OF A BEHIND THE  
SCENES LOOK AT THE WHITE HOUSE, THE RETURN OF ITS HOLIDAY CLASSIC WITH  
NEW CAST MEMBERS AND A CULT FAVORITE MUSICAL COMEDY**

**In Addition, American Blues Launches a New Performance Repertory  
"The Response Rep" and Continues Its Community Service with  
Ripped: The Living Newspaper Festival and The Lincoln Project**

CHICAGO –Producing Artistic Director **Gwendolyn Whiteside** is proud to announce **American Blues Theater's** 2015 – 2016 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season, "Seeing is Believing." All main stage performances take place at the **Greenhouse Theater Center**, 2257 N. Lincoln Ave. FlexPasses for Season 30 "Seeing is Believing" are available now at [AmericanBluesTheater.com](http://AmericanBluesTheater.com) or by calling 312.725.4228. For more information on the current and next season's productions visit [AmericanBluesTheater.com](http://AmericanBluesTheater.com).  
Season 30 includes:

**Main Stage:**

***The Rainmaker***, August 28 - September 27  
***It's A Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!***, November 20 – December 27  
***Looking Over the President's Shoulder***, January 29 – March 6, 2016  
***Little Shop of Horrors***, April 29 – May 29, 2016

**Additional American Blues Theater Offerings:**

***"The Response Rep:" Dutchman*** and world premiere, development workshops and readings, September 2016 production  
***Ripped: The Living Newspaper Festival***, spring 2016  
***The Lincoln Project***, throughout the year at Chicago Public Schools

"Since 1985, American Blues has brought Chicagoland audiences nearly 125 productions and 42 world premieres. Critically-acclaimed and lauded productions spanning three decades including the inaugural productions of *Dogman's Last Stand*, *Stalag 17*, *The Flight of the Phoenix*, *Keely & Du*, *The Hairy Ape*, *Catch 22*, *Oklahoma*, *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*, *Tobacco Road*, *Hank Williams: Lost Highway* and *Native Son*. This season we welcome returning artists, Co-founder Ed Blatchford and Ensemble Member James Still, and contributors with whom we are building a future, Timothy Douglas, Darren Canady and Chuck Smith. Our 30<sup>th</sup> season continues this legacy and captures the importance of hope as one bares witness to extraordinary events in a variety of circumstances. From trusting in hope and faith to see the end of a drought, to review one's life with the help of an angel, to being a silent participant in world events, to dreaming of a world "Somewhere That's Green" while a plant is devouring the neighborhood, seeing is believing!," said Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside.

- more -

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"Following the success of our development and the fully-staged production of *Native Son*, co-produced with Court Theatre, we are developing "The Response Rep," a call and response evening of plays that include Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and a world premiere, to be named soon. We are honored that Goodman Theater Resident Director Chuck Smith will direct both productions in fall of 2016. Through this new project, "The Response Rep," and our other artistic programs, American Blues continues our mission of extensive community service and arts education throughout the Chicago area," continued Whiteside.

**MORE INFORMATION ON AMERICAN BLUES THEATER'S 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY – "SEEING IS BELIEVING"**

***The Rainmaker***

Written by **N. Richard Nash**

Direction by Co-founding Ensemble Member **Ed Blatchford**

**August 28 – September 27**

Featuring American Blues Ensemble member **Steve Key** (as Starbuck), guest artists **Robert Brueler, Howie Johnson, Matt Pratt, Vince Teninty, Danny Goldring, and Linsey Page Morton** (as Lizzie)

**Press night: Thursday, Sept. 3 at 7:30 p.m.**

Performance schedule: Previews begin August 28; Performance schedule: Thursdays – Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.; Sundays at 2:30 p.m.

Ticket price: \$19 - \$49

"After 30 years, American Blues is still a vital part of the Chicago theater scene. I'm honored to return and represent the initial pulse - that first spark that Rick Cleveland, William Payne, Jim Leaming and I shared in 1985." – Ed Blatchford, director

N. Richard Nash's unabashedly optimistic play became a Broadway hit telling the story of plain and hardworking Lizzie Curry as she finds herself falling, against her better judgment, for a traveler who promises to bring rain to her family's ever-dry Texas town.

"After nearly half a century, *The Rainmaker* still makes a handsome case for miracles," said the *Los Angeles Times*.

14<sup>th</sup> SMASH YEAR

***It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!***

Based on **Frank Capra's** film

Original Direction by Ensemble member **Marty Higginbotham**

Associate Direction by Producing Artistic Director **Gwendolyn Whiteside**

Music Direction by **Michael Mahler**

Featuring American Blues artists **Zach Kenney** (as George Bailey), **Ian Paul Custer, Michael Mahler, John Mohrlein, James Joseph, Shawn Goudie** and guest artists Denice Mahler and **Amanda Tanguay** (as Mary Bailey)

**November 20 – December 27**

**Press night: Wednesday, Nov. 25 at 7:30 p.m.**

Performance schedule: Previews begin Nov 20; Performance schedule: Thursdays and Fridays at 7:30 p.m.; Saturdays at 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; Sundays at 2:30 p.m. Additional holiday performances, TBA

Ticket price: \$19 - \$49

For 14 years, the American Blues Theater Ensemble has treated Chicago audiences to a live radio broadcast of Frank Capra's iconic film *It's a Wonderful Life*. This year's production introduces Chicago to a new George and Mary Bailey, Zach Kenney and Amanda Tanguay. Kenney and Tanguay are joined by the incredible returning cast who recreates the entire town of Bedford Falls with Foley sounds effects, an original score and holiday carols. Critics call this "perfect Christmas theater" and "first class holiday fare." Following each performance, audiences enjoy a meet and greet with cast members with milk and cookies

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CHICAGO PREMIERE

***Looking Over the President's Shoulder***

Written by Artistic Affiliate **James Still**

Directed by **Timothy Douglas**

Featuring American Blues Ensemble Member **Manny Buckley**

**January 29 – March 6, 2016**

**Press night: Thursday, Feb. 4 at 7:30 p.m.**

Performance schedule: Previews begin January 29; Performance schedule: Thursdays – Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.;

Sundays at 2:30 p.m.

Ticket price: \$19 - \$49

"Long before the election of President Barack Obama, there was an African-American man who, for 21 years, had very much been running things at the White House. It is with great honor and eagerness that I return to Chicago to stage this intimate and moving tribute composed by longtime friend and colleague James Still." – Timothy Douglas, director

Before Lee Daniels' "The Butler," playwright James Still shared the real-life, inspirational story of Alonzo Fields, grandson of a freed slave, who grew up in an all-black town in southern Indiana. Forced by the Depression to give up his dreams of becoming an opera singer, Fields accepts a job at the White House and served for 21 years. This tour-de-force solo play is told from the unique perspective of serving four U.S. presidents and their families: Herbert Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Dwight Eisenhower. "Gentle Americana, amiable, and dignified...the appeal is its peeking through the keyhole quality."

– *The Washington Post*

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***Little Shop of Horrors***

Book and Lyrics by **Howard Ashman**

Music by **Alan Menken**

Direction by **Jonathan Berry**

Music Direction by Ensemble member **Austin Cook**

Featuring American Blues Ensemble members **Michael Mahler** (Seymour), **Dara Cameron** (Audrey) and **Ed Kross** (Orin Scrivello)

**April 29 – May 29, 2016**

**Press night: Friday, May 6 at 7:30 p.m.**

Performance schedule: Previews begin April 29; Performance schedule: Thursdays & Fridays at 7:30 p.m.; Saturdays at 3:30 and 7:30 p.m.; Sundays at 2:30 p.m.

Ticket price: \$19 - \$49

"I've loved *Little Shop* ever since I was a child, but my appreciation for it has grown. Beneath the glorious camp and the thrills, is a yearning cry from the poor who are struggling for the life they feel they deserve. I'm excited to work with this remarkable American Blues team to take this piece back to its roots and find the gritty, truthful heart at the center of all the fun."

– Jonathan Berry, director

Following the success of 2013's *Hank Williams: Lost Highway*, American Blues immediately planned to utilize the phenomenal musical talent of its company including Michael Mahler, Dara Cameron, Ed Kross and Austin Cook in another musical. *Little Shop of Horrors* seemed like a perfect fit for the skills and allows the company to produce a comedy with great music and a fun story. In this gleefully gruesome musical, Seymour, a poor florist's assistant, allows his craving for fame and fortune to seduce him to play nursemaid to a man-eating plant. *The New York Times* said *Little Shop* "leaves the audience ...feeling like Audrey II ... ravenous for more."

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## ADDITIONAL AMERICAN BLUES THEATER PROGRAMMING:

### **"THE RESPONSE REP"**

#### ***Dutchman***

Written by **Amiri Baraka**

#### ***World Premiere***

Written by Artistic Affiliate **Darren Canady**

Direction by **Chuck Smith**

Featuring Artistic Affiliate **Eric Lynch** (*Native Son*)

Workshops and public readings throughout 2015 - 2016

Production September 2016

Throughout the 2015 – 2016 season, American Blues Theater hosts workshops, live staged readings and other events featuring Amiri Baraka's award-winning *Dutchman* and a world premiere production by Artistic Affiliate Darren Canady, to be announced. These productions will be staged in repertory during American Blues' 2016 – 2017 season.

### ***Ripped: The Living Newspaper Festival***

#### **May 23, 2016**

Written and direction by various Chicago artists

Since 2009, American Blues Theater has produced 105 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 5<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> 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 2,500 students have participated in the program.

### **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 39-member Ensemble has 539 combined years of collaboration on stage. As of 2015, they've individually received nearly 150 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater including the 2014 Jeff Awards for Production-Musical-Midsized, *Hank Williams: Lost Highway*; Actor in a Principal Role – Musical, Matthew Brumlow, *Hank Williams: Lost Highway*; Solo Performance, Gwendolyn Whiteside, *Grounded*; Music Direction, Malcolm Ruhl, *Hank Williams: Lost Highway* and Sound Design, Lindsay Jones, *Grounded* and over 22 Black Theatre Alliance Awards. The artists are honored with Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards and numerous other accolades.

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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 DeiTos, 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, Jim Ortlieb, Suzanne Petri, Carmen Roman, Editha Rosario, Sarah E. Ross and Gwendolyn Whiteside.

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