

GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE
Producing Artistic Director

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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
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KEVIN R. KELLY
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MICHAEL MAHLER
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CHIP PRINGLE
in memoriam

1016 N. DEARBORN STREET
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60610
AmericanBluesTheater.com 312-725-4228

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MEDIA CONTACT: James Juliano
SHOUT Marketing & Media Relations
773.852.0506
james@shoutchicago.com

*Media passes, photographs, videos, interviews and additional materials may be available upon request.

**AMERICAN BLUES THEATER'S 30TH 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 30th 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 or by calling 312.725.4228. For more information on the current and next season's productions visit 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 30th 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 -

AMERICAN BLUES THEATER announces 30th anniversary season, "Seeing is Believing," page 2 of 5

"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 30TH 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 dry Midwest town.

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

14th 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**

February 5 – March 6, 2016

Press night: Thursday, Feb. 11 at 7:30 p.m.

Performance schedule: Previews begin February 5; 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*

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 5th-10th 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-Midsize, *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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