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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**American Blues Theater announces its 4-play 2020-2021 Season  
Including the Chicago Premiere of *AIRNESS* by Chelsea Marcantel, directed by Gwendolyn  
Whiteside; World Premiere of *ALMA* by Benjamin Benne, directed by Ana Velazquez;  
August Wilson's *FENCES*, directed by Monty Cole;  
and the 19th<sup>th</sup> annual production of *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: LIVE IN CHICAGO!*  
from Frank Capra's film, directed by Gwendolyn Whiteside and music directed by Michael Mahler.**

Chicago, IL— **American Blues Theater**, under the continued leadership of Artistic Director **Gwendolyn Whiteside**, announces the lineup for its 2020-2021 Season, "Breaking Boundaries". American Blues' 35<sup>th</sup> Season will include the Chicago Premiere of *Airness* by **Chelsea Marcantel**, directed by **Gwendolyn Whiteside**; the World Premiere of *Alma* by **Benjamin Benne**, directed by **Ana Velazquez**; **August Wilson's *Fences***, directed by **Monty Cole**; the 19<sup>th</sup> annual production of *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* from **Frank Capra's** film, directed by **Gwendolyn Whiteside** and music directed by **Michael Mahler**. All performances in the 2020-2021 season will take place at Stage 773, located at 1225 W Belmont Ave, Chicago.

"We're thrilled to announce our 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary season 'Breaking Boundaries'," notes Artistic Director **Gwendolyn Whiteside**. "This season showcases the best of human spirit, depicting opportunities of growth each person faces when confronted by boundaries of self-defined or perceived identity. *Fences* first premiered in 1985, the year American Blues was formed. We're honored to present this classic title in the American dramatic canon. This marks our first August Wilson production in our history. In addition, we commit to new work by producing the world premiere of 2019 Blue Ink Playwriting Award winning script *Alma* and rocking Chicago with the premiere of *Airness*. This season is dedicated, in gratitude, to Chicago for its incredible 35-years of support to American Blues Theater as we redefined and reinvented our own identity."

**The 2020-2021 American Blues Theater Season up close:**

***Fences***  
**by August Wilson**  
**directed by Monty Cole**  
**September 4 – October 17, 2020**

**Press Opening: September 10, 2020 at 7:30 p.m.**

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize. This is the sensational drama about Troy Maxson, a former star of the Negro baseball leagues, who now works as a garbage man in 1957 Pittsburgh. Excluded as a black man from major leagues during his prime, Troy's bitterness takes its toll on his relationships with his family. Ensemble member and award-winning actress **Wandachristine** plays "Rose Maxson".

**19<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Production of**  
***It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!***  
**from Frank Capra's film**  
**directed by Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside**

**music direction by Ensemble member Michael Mahler**

**November 12, 2020 – January 2, 2021**

**Press Opening: November 19, 2020 at 7:30 p.m.**

Chicago's second-longest holiday play! For 19 years, the American Blues ensemble has treated Chicago audiences to a live 1940s radio broadcast of holiday favorite *It's a Wonderful Life*. The incredible cast recreates the entire town of Bedford Falls with Foley sound effects, an original score and holiday carols. The Bedford Falls "residents" extend their hospitality after every performance when audiences are treated to milk and cookies served by the cast.

***World Premiere***

***Alma***

**by Benjamin Benne**

**directed by Ana Velazquez**

**January 29 – March 13, 2021**

**Press Opening: February 4, 2021 at 7:30 p.m.**

Winner of 2019 Blue Ink Playwriting Award. Working mom Alma has single-handedly raised her daughter, Angel, on tough love, home-cooked comida, and lots of prayers. But on the eve of the all-important SAT, Alma discovers her daughter isn't at home studying. A sacrifice from Alma's past weighs heavy on their present; now, Alma fears her worst nightmare may soon be their reality. Will the American Dream cost them a life together?

***Chicago Premiere***

***Airness***

**by Chelsea Marcantel**

**directed by Gwendolyn Whiteside**

**May 7 – June 13, 2021**

**Press Opening: May 13, 2021 at 7:30 p.m.**

Winner of 2018 M. Elizabeth Osborn New Play Award by American Theatre Critics Association. When Nina enters her first air guitar competition, she thinks winning will be easy. But as she befriends a group of charismatic nerds all committed to becoming the next champion, she discovers that there's more to this art form than playing pretend. Following her mission to shred or be shredded, *Airness* is an exuberant reminder that everything we need to rock is already inside us. A comedy about competition, completion, and finding the airness inside yourself.

**Additional 2020-2021 Programming**

***Ripped Festival: Edition 19***

**Spring 2021**

**Written and direction by various Chicago artists**

Since 2009, American Blues Theater has produced 145 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 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 Learning Standards to engage 5th-10th graders about the life of Abraham Lincoln, specifically the events surrounding the Emancipation Proclamation. Students watch scenes performed by professional actors, participate in discussions, and most importantly, write their own plays. Since the program's launch in 2013, nearly 20,000 students have participated in the program.

**Subscriptions**

All mainstage performances take place at **Stage 773**, 1225 W. Belmont Ave. The Blue Card – the most affordable ticket offer the 2020-2021 season are available now at [AmericanBluesTheater.com](http://AmericanBluesTheater.com) or by calling **773.654.3103**.

**About American Blues Theater**

Winner of the American Theatre Wing's prestigious National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.

The diverse and multi-generational artists have established the second-oldest professional Equity Ensemble theater in Chicago. The 32-member Ensemble has 600+ combined years of collaboration on stage. As of 2020, the theater and artists received 213 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 38 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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