

# *A Raisin in the Sun*

*by Lorraine Hansberry*



**Pear Avenue Theatre**  
June 24 - July 10

The Pear Avenue Theatre proudly presents

# **A Raisin in the Sun**

**by Lorraine Hansberry**

Directors

**Aldo Billingslea & Sara Capule**

Producer

**Diane Tasca**

Stage Manager

**Jenn Poret**

Scenic Designer

**Ron Gasparinetti**

Lighting Designer

**Jocelyn Squires**

Costume Designer

**Barbara Murray**

Sound Designer

**Jeanie K. Smith  
& Gordon Smith.**

Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

## The Ensemble (in order of appearance)

William David Southall ..... *Travis Younger*  
Jennifer Perkins-Stephens..... *Ruth Younger*  
Michael Wayne Rice..... *Walter Lee Younger, Jr.*  
Yhá Mourhia D. Wright ..... *Beneatha Younger*  
Kendra Owens ..... *Lena Younger*  
Bezachin Jifar..... *Joseph Asagai*  
Alec F. Brown..... *George Murchison*  
René Marquerite Banks ..... *Mrs. Johnson*  
Keith C. Marshall..... *Karl Lindner*  
Dimitri Woods..... *Bobo/ Fight Captain*

*The play takes place in the 1950s in an apartment on the Chicago's South Side.  
There will be a fifteen-minute intermission after Act I.*

## The Production Team

Directors..... Aldo Billingslea & Sara Capule  
Producer ..... Diane Tasca  
Stage Manager..... Jenn Poret  
Scenic Designer..... Ron Garparinetti  
Lighting Designer..... Jocelyn Squires  
Costume Designer ..... Barbara Murray  
Sound Designers ..... Jeanie K. Smith & Gordon Smith  
Master Carpenter..... Charles McKeithan  
Assistant Stage Manager..... Celine Delcayre  
Choreographer..... Janesta Edmonds  
Wig Designer ..... Rande Harris  
Production Manager..... Ray Renati  
Publicity Directors ..... Jeanie K. Smith & Shannon Stowe  
Postcard Designer..... Patricia Tyler  
Program Consultant..... Susan Petit  
Website Designer ..... Ray Renati

## The Pear would like to thank the following organizations and individuals for their contributions to this production:

Santa Clara University	Foothill College	Hillbarn Theatre
Palo Alto Players	TheatreWorks	Larry Condit
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Liz Nelson	Valda Southall	Bob Steiner
Rebecca Willis		

## Director's Note

### “Harlem” by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore—  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over—  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

Some of the artists who created this show have had their own dreams deferred. Some lofty dreams have withered on the vine because not enough theatre companies are producing plays that offer enough opportunities to African-American artists. Producing theatre is always a risk, and the Pear Avenue Theatre is taking a bigger risk than usual by producing this particular play. While most theatre historians place *A Raisin in the Sun* among the greatest of all American plays (as the Pear has done this season), relatively few theatres take the risk to produce it. Such choices leave fewer roles for black actors-- and more dreams deferred. All the more reason that this cast and crew are so grateful to the Pear for taking the risk to share this story and allow these artists to see their dream come true.

—Aldo Billingslea

## About the Playwright and the Play

Lorraine Hansberry (1930-1965) is known primarily for *A Raisin in the Sun*, but in her short life she wrote other plays, notably *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, playing on Broadway at the time of her death from cancer; *Les Blancs*, completed by her ex-husband, Robert Nemiroff; and the unproduced teleplay *The Drinking Gourd*. She also wrote poems, speeches, essays, letters, autobiography, and fiction, some of which Nemiroff published as *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* and turned into a 1969 stage production of the same name. Nemiroff, who was her literary executor, co-wrote the Tony-winning 1973 musical *Raisin*, based on *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Hansberry's father was a banker and real-estate investor, her uncle was a professor of African studies at Howard University, and the family's friends

and guests included such prominent African Americans as W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Langston Hughes. In 1938 the Hansberrys bought a house in a white Chicago neighborhood and lived in it for eight months, but violence and Illinois law forced them out. With the help of the NAACP, they won a suit against restrictive covenants (decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1940), but residential segregation continued *de facto*.

While attending the University of Wisconsin, Hansberry was inspired by Sean O'Casey's powerful depiction of an impoverished Dublin family in *Juno and the Paycock*. After two years she dropped out of college, moved to New York, and began working for Paul Robeson's newspaper *Freedom*. She wrote articles about liberal causes including nuclear disarmament, anti-colonialism, women's rights, and racial equality, but *A Raisin in the Sun* is her major contribution to the reconsideration of American values. Named the best play of 1959 by the New York Drama Critics Circle, *Raisin* ran for 530 performances. It starred Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, and Diana Sands. Hansberry also wrote the screenplay for the 1961 film based on her play. Bruce Norris's 2010 Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Chybourne Park* was inspired by Hansberry's drama. The first work by an African American to be produced on Broadway, *Raisin* launched the careers of many African-American performers and broke the ground for playwrights including August Wilson and Lynn Nottage. For 30 years San Francisco's Lorraine Hansberry Theatre has continued this tradition by producing plays by and about African Americans.

The specific setting of *Raisin*—Chicago's South Side ghetto in the 1950s—gives rise to equally specific issues, including the confinement of a growing African-American population into too small a space, the prohibitively high cost of decent housing; the exclusion of most blacks from factory and office jobs, limiting their earning power; and a crackdown on doctors performing abortions, sending desperate women to unlicensed practitioners. We also see a conflict of values between black immigrants from the South (like Lena) and their children raised in the North, as well as dawning interest by African Americans in Africa itself. Two of these concerns are reflected in elements unfortunately cut from the original production and the film: Beneatha's new hairstyle and Mrs. Johnson's warnings about violence against blacks who move into white neighborhoods (these elements are included in this production). Specific as the play's issues are, everyone can identify with the underlying themes, including family relationships and economic struggle.

Hansberry took her title from Langston Hughes' poem "Dream Deferred," which asks what happens when dreams must be postponed. Do they dry up, sag, stink—or explode? Like Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *Raisin* asks us to think about what happens after the action is over and to consider how we are implicated in our society's hypocrisies and repressions. If we walk away from this play feeling happy about the world, we have not been paying attention to what Hansberry is telling us.

--Susan Petit

## Who's Who in This Production



**René Marquerite Banks** (*Mrs. Johnson*) is a graduate of California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, with a B.A. in Theater Arts; she wrote and performed a one-woman show *Behind Bars: Wit Dem Fools* at the Pomona Black Box. She portrayed Antonio in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* at Pomona Town Center and Lorraine Hansberry/ Mama in *To Be Young Gifted And Black* with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Theatre. Recently she played Simone in the original play *Bus Stop Journals* by Professor Owen Seda from the University of Zimbabwe. Miss Banks is pleased to make her debut performance at the Pear.



**Alec F. Brown** (*George Murchison*) is thrilled to be making his debut at the Pear. He is originally from Sacramento, where he fell in love with theatre at a very early age when he played Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He is very glad to be part of such an important play in American theatre. Alec currently attends Santa Clara University, where he is majoring in Theatre Arts. At SCU he was recently seen as Astrov in *Uncle Vanya* and as Banquo in *Macbeth*.



**Bezachin Jifar** (*Joseph Asagai*) permanently moved from Ethiopia to the U.S. in 2005. He has appeared in *Ragtime* with South Bay Musical Theater; has participated in Playground's Monday night staged-reading series; and has played the title role in Santa Clara University's *Macbeth* - a role so good, he believes, it was worth losing one's head for. He recently graduated with a B.A. in Theater Arts from SCU and would like to thank his director for involving him in *Raisin* before he leaves for NY to pursue his MFA in playwriting. Tx Aldo. DOMINOES... (dollar in the swear jar)!!



**Keith Marshall** (*Karl Lindner*) is excited to be working with an amazingly talented cast on such an important piece of American Theater. He was recently seen in George Packer's *Betrayed* at Stanford University, and in Renegade Theatre Experiment's *All This Intimacy* and *Killer Joe*. Many thanks to Aldo for casting him, to the Pear Avenue Theatre for choosing this piece, and to his family and friends for their constant support.



**Kendra Owens** (*Lena Younger*) has performed in *The Vagina Monologues* (The Center for Spiritual Living and Engage Her Conference at Berkeley), *Nickel and Dimed* (Pear Avenue Theatre), *Doubt* (Pacific Repertory Theatre, Carmel), *The Sugar Witch* (Northside Theatre and New Conservatory Theatre, S.F.), *Waiting to Dance* (Renegade Theatre Experiment), *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (The Willows Theatre), *Anton in Show Business* (Palo Alto Players), *Ooh Bla Dee* (Understudy, Theatreworks), *The*

*Crucible* (Cañada College), *Long Time Since Yesterday* and *Romeo and Juliet* (San Jose State University), and *Gem of the Ocean* (The Next Stage). She is honored to be part of this production of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Thanks to God, my daughter and friends for their support.



**Jennifer Perkins-Stephens** (*Ruth Younger*) has a Master's degree in acting from Columbia University and has worked professionally in both New York and Los Angeles. She is very excited to be back home. She wishes to thank her husband, Ryck, for all his love and support and her children, RJ and Samora, for letting mommy rehearse and miss goodnight hugs and kisses. She thanks her mom for reminding her that life is too short not to live your dreams. Jennifer greatly appreciates the extra help her mom and sister Stacey have given her and she thanks them again for always being there for her.



**Michael Wayne Rice** (*Walter Lee Younger, Jr.*) I am MichaelWayneRice.com. I help create stage movies. What's a stage movie? I help take plays and turn them into productions that are as good or better than anything you can see on TV or film. I'm just that passionate about THE STAGE. Cast and crew for *A Raisin in the Sun*, have been fabulous. I enjoyed almost every minute (cept for the time I ran into a wall--my bad). I am MichaelWayneRice.com



**William David Southall** (*Travis Younger*) recently appeared in American Conservatory Theater's *A Christmas Carol* in the roles of Spanish Onion, Pub Boy, and Clerk. Some previous roles include Joe Thibodeaux in TheatreWorks' *Caroline, or Change* and the ensemble of *Show Boat* with Broadway by the Bay. He is featured as an extra in three films including PIXAR University's award-winning short *Play by Play*. He is in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at Oakland School for the Arts, where he studies piano, and is enrolled in the Artist Diploma Program of the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts.



**Dimitri Woods** (*Bobo*) is thrilled to be a part of the Pear Avenue Theatre's production *A Raisin in the Sun* as Bobo. He was last seen as Schroeder in Santa Clara University's production of *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*. He would like to thank Aldo Billingslea for this wonderful opportunity to be a part of this production, and the cast as well for continuously pushing him to be a better listener and performer. Working with such great actors has raised his own caliber, to which he is eternally grateful. Enjoy the show!



**Yhá Mourhia D. Wright** (*Beneatha Younger*) gained her onstage experience at Santa Clara University in *Fuenteovejuna* and *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*. She directed Igwebuiké's Martin Luther King Night in 2008 and directed and wrote the script for Martin Luther King Night 2009, entitled *The Urgency of Now*. Her current work in progress is a collection of her poetry entitled *With All My Love*. She would like to thank her family and close friends for all the encouragement, love and support. Lastly, but far from least, she'd like to thank the Director, Aldo Billingslea, for his faith in the gift she couldn't recognize; and the opportunity to be a part of this profound and groundbreaking work.

**Aldo Billingslea** (*Co-Director*) studied directing at Austin College in Sherman, Texas under Dr. Barbara Means Fraser. He now teaches with her at Santa Clara University, where he has directed Lorraine Hansberry's *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Coriolanus*, *The Odd Couple*, and *The Shadow Box* with co-director Jennifer BeVard. He also directed the World Premiere of Lia Romeo's *Right Place/Right Time* for Renegade Theatre Experiment where he is a member of the Advisory Board.

**Sara Capule** (*Co-Director*) is thrilled to be part of her first production at the Pear. She received her B.A. in English and Theatre Arts from Santa Clara University where in 2008 she was awarded the Outstanding Achievement Award in Directing. She currently works at Stanford University's School of Medicine and recently returned to theatre, directing staged readings of Deborah Lake Fortson's *Body and Soul* and Lawrence Nelson's *Into the Ether* earlier this year. Deepest gratitude to family, friends, and colleagues with special thanks to Alex, Ms.B, and Aldo for not letting her passion for theatre fall by the wayside.

**Celine Delcayre** (*Assistant Stage Manager*) is a Theater Arts and Business student at Sonoma State University. She is currently working as an intern for the Shady Shakespeare Theater Company, and is preparing to dramaturg Sonoma State's upcoming production of *How I Learned to Drive* in the fall. She has also filled the role of Dance Captain for a student production of *Alice in Wonderland* and recently participated in the Soft Open Short Play Festival. She would like to thank the Pear Avenue Theater for giving her the opportunity to be a part of this production, as well as her family, Dinna Myers, and Dylan Waite for being tolerant of her crazy schedule.

**Ron Gasparinetti** (*Scenic Designer*) was born and raised in Newark, NJ. He attended Essex Catholic High School and Montclair State University, where he earned his B.F.A. degree in technical theatre with a scenic design concentration. Ron worked the night shift for the Newark police department while in college, graduating in 1986. He has worked steadily since then as a technical director,

scenic designer, lighting designer, props designer, and production manager—sometimes all at once! He even ventured into the field of acting for a short time. In the last 30 years, Ron has been involved with over 400 productions. In 2007, he joined forces with Charles McKeithan to form THRUST Scenic Design & Construction. To date, the company has built a clientele of 12 theatre companies in the Bay Area and has designed and built over 75 productions.

**Barbara Murray** (*Costume Designer*) is the Chair and Costume Designer for the Department of Theatre & Dance at Santa Clara University. She earned her B.A. in Theatre Arts from SCU and received her M.F.A from Sothern Methodist University. Barbara has designed costumes for Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Children's Theatre Workshop, Cabrillo Stage, Summer Repertory Theatre, Lyric Theatre and Opera San Jose. She has worked as a cutter/drafter and crafts artisan for Milwaukee Repertory, the Pacific Conservatory for the Performing Arts, and Lyric Theatre, and worked as assistant Dyer/Painter in the San Francisco Opera costume shop. Barbara has a particular interest in the social history of fashion, and she is working on a book about women's clothing during the Gold Rush period in California.

**Jenn Poret** (*Stage Manager*) is excited to make her debut with the Pear Avenue Theatre. Jenn graduated from Santa Clara University with her B.A. in theatre, with an emphasis in stage management. *Raisin* marks the third show she has stage managed for Aldo, and all have been a dream. Jenn has stage managed for The Western Stage, AMTSJ, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, Renegade Theatre Experiment and Bay Area Educational Theatre Company. She works for the City of Mountain View at the MVCPA and would like to thank her friends, coworkers and family for supporting her by attending today's performance. And a Jenn-sized thank you to Aldo for sending a text poem to ask her to do the show.

**Jeanie Smith & Gordon Smith** (*Sound Designers*) loved working on this classic play with such a talented cast and crew!

**Jocelyn Squires** (*Lighting Designer*) graduated from Reed College in 2008. Recent favorite lighting designs include *Death of a Salesman*, *Hay Fever*, and *Metamorphoses* (the Pear) and *Blithe Spirit* (Palo Alto Players). She supports her lighting addiction by working as a lighting technician, carpenter, and show crew for Theatre Works, Smuin Ballet, and Opera San Jose, among others. Favorite activities have included light board operation for PA Players' *Romeo and Juliet* and *Rent*, and for TheatreWorks' *Auctioning the Ainsleys*. When not doing theatre, Jocelyn enjoys cycling, photography, coffee, learning Chinese, and absurdity.

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