

GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

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CAST ANNOUNCED FOR GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE WEST COAST PREMIERE OF “PARADISE BLUE”

WRITTEN BY DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU AND DIRECTED BY STORI AYERS

FEATURING TYLA ABERCRUMBIE, WENDELL B. FRANKLIN,
ALANI ILONGWE, JOHN EARL JELKS AND SHAYNA SMALL

PREVIEWS BEGIN NOVEMBER 9 - OPENING NIGHT IS NOVEMBER 18

LOS ANGELES (October 12, 2021) – Geffen Playhouse today announced the full cast for its West Coast premiere of *Paradise Blue*, written by Tony Award-nominated **Dominique Morisseau** (*Ain't Too Proud*, *Skeleton Crew*) and directed by **Stori Ayers** (*Blood at the Root*, *The Last O.G.*).

The cast includes **Tyla Abercrombie** (*The Chi*, *Utopia*) as Silver, **Wendell B. Franklin** (*The Good Fight*, *Madame Secretary*) as Blue, **Alani iLongwe** (*The Legend of Georgia McBride*, *Two Trains Running*) as P-Sam, Tony Award nominee **John Earl Jelks** (*Radio Golf*, *Sweat*) as Corn, and **Shayna Small** (*Parable of the Sower*, *Rags Parkland Sings Songs of the Future*) as Pumpkin.

Previews for *Paradise Blue* begin Tuesday, November 9 in the Gil Cates Theater at Geffen Playhouse. Opening night is Thursday, November 18.

Welcome to the sultry, jazz-filled Paradise Club. It's 1949 in Detroit, and trumpet-playing club owner Blue has a tough decision to make. Should he sell his jazz joint as gentrification is banging on the door? The house band is desperate to stay, Blue's demons are tempting him to leave, and the arrival of a seductive stranger turns everything upside down. In Tony Award-nominated playwright Dominique Morisseau's (*Ain't Too Proud*, *Skeleton Crew*) powerful noir-inspired drama, a makeshift family and their troubled bandleader find themselves fighting for the future of Paradise.

Paradise Blue is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com

PARADISE BLUE

Written by **Dominique Morisseau**

Directed by **Stori Ayers**

Previews: Tuesday, November 9 – Wednesday, November 17, 2021

Opening Night: Thursday, November 18, 2021

Closing Night: Sunday, December 12, 2021

CAST

Tyla Abercrombie as Silver

Wendell B. Franklin as Blue

Alani iLongwe as P-Sam

John Earl Jelks as Corn

Shayna Small as Pumpkin

PRODUCTION TEAM

Scenic Designer **Edward E. Haynes, Jr.**

Costume Designer **Wendell C. Carmichael**

Lighting Designer **Alan C. Edwards**

Sound Designer **Jeff Gardner**

Composer **David “Preach” Balfour**

Fight Director **Steve Rankin**

Intimacy Choreographer **Nedra Constance Gallegos**

Production Stage Manager **Shawna Voragen**

Assistant Stage Manager **Liv Scott**

Casting Director **Phyllis Schuringa, CSA**

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Monday No performance

Tuesday – Friday 8:00 p.m.

Saturday 3:00 and 8:00 p.m.

Sunday 2:00 and 7:00 p.m.

LOCATION

Gil Cates Theater at Geffen Playhouse

10886 Le Conte Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets currently priced at \$30.00 - \$129.00. Available in person at the Geffen Playhouse box office, by phone at 310.208.2028 or online at www.geffenplayhouse.org. Fees may apply.

Currently, children under 12 years of age will not be admitted. Proof of vaccination and masks are required – additional policy details can be found at www.geffenplayhouse.org/plan/reopening/.

Rush tickets for each day’s performance are made available to the general public two hours before showtime at the box office. \$35.00 General/\$15.00 Student.

COLLEGE AUDIENCES

Through a variety of events and other opportunities, Geffen Playhouse welcomes college students to experience the live storytelling presented on our stages. We are proud of our association with UCLA’s School of Theater, Film, and Television, and open our doors to all college students throughout Los Angeles. More information is available at www.geffenplayhouse.org/college.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Dominique Morisseau (Playwright)

Dominique Morisseau is the author of *The Detroit Project (A 3-Play Cycle): Skeleton Crew* (Atlantic Theater Company), *Paradise Blue* (Signature Theatre), and *Detroit '67* (Public Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem and NBT). Additional plays include: *Pipeline* (Lincoln Center Theatre), *Sunset Baby* (LAByrinth Theatre), *Blood at the Root* (National Black Theatre), and *Follow Me To Nellie's* (Premiere Stages). She is also the Tony Award nominated book writer on the Broadway musical *Ain't Too Proud – The Life and Times of the Temptations* (Imperial Theatre). TV/Film projects: She most recently served as co-producer on the Showtime series *Shameless*. She's currently developing projects with Netflix, HBO, and A24, and wrote the film adaptation of the documentary *STEP* for Fox Searchlight. Awards include: Spirit of Detroit Award, PoNY Fellowship, Sky-Cooper Prize, TEER Trailblazer Award, Steinberg Playwright Award, Audelco Awards, NBFT August Wilson Playwriting Award, Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama, OBIE Award (2), and the Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellowship, named one of *Variety's* Women of Impact for 2017-18 and a recipient of the 2018 MacArthur Genius Grant.

Stori Ayers (Director)

Stori Ayers is a New York-based actor/director, Associate Artistic Director at Chautauqua Theatre Company and co-founder of [RARE] Lotus Productions. Originally from Washington, D.C., she has a passion for stories that challenge social norms, create conversations in the community, and ignite within her generation a spirit of activism. Stori is an original cast member and producer of Dominique Morisseau's *Blood at the Root*, winner of the Graham F. Smith Peace Foundation Prize for its promotion of human rights. She recently played Regina, childhood best friend of Tiffany Haddish, on the TBS hit series *The Last O.G.* starring Tracy Morgan. Stori has worked at Lincoln Center Theater, Signature Theatre, Ensemble Studio Theatre, the National Black Theatre, Baltimore Centre Stage, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Syracuse Stage, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Ensemble Theatre Cincinnati, Signature Theatre DC, Premiere Stages, Pennsylvania Center Stage and Round House Theatre, to name a few. Stori is a proud member of Actors' Equity, holds a B.A. from Mary Baldwin University, an M.F.A. in Acting from Penn State University, and is a writing assistant to Dominique Morisseau.

Tyla Abercrombie (Silver)

Tyla is excited to make her Geffen Playhouse debut. Regional credits: *Sweat* (Huntington Theatre Company, Goodman Theatre); *Pipeline* (Victory Gardens Theater); *Paradise Blue* and *In Darfur* (TimeLine Theatre); *East Texas Hot Links* (Writers Theatre); *Gem of the Ocean*, *The Piano Lesson*, and *Flyin' West* (Court Theatre); *Detroit '67* (Northlight Theatre); *All the Way*, *Good People*, *Clybourne Park*, *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, *You Can't Take It With You* (Asolo Repertory Theatre); *Intimate Apparel*, *In The Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater and Actors Theatre of Louisville); *Radio Golf* (Pittsburgh Public Theater); *Piano Lesson* (Portland Stage Company); *Jitney* (St. Louis Black Repertory Company). TV credits: *Somebody Somewhere*, *Utopia*, *Easy*, *Chicago Med*, *Chicago P.D.*, *Empire*, and *Shrink*. Tyla holds a B.A. from Columbia College. She is a company member with TimeLine Theatre. As a playwright, she was the recipient of the TimeLine Theatre Writers Collective Fellow 2016 and The Raven Theatre Playwrights Initiative Award 2020. Her most recent play *Relentless* begins production December 2021. Tyla is currently in the Showtime series *The Chi*. And a proud member of AEA.

Wendell B. Franklin (Blue)

Wendell B. Franklin has performed at theaters across the country, including Atlantic Theatre Company (world premiere of Dominique Morisseau's *Skeleton Crew*, directed by Ruben Santiago Hudson), People's Light and Theatre Company (*Fences* directed by Kamilah Forbes), The Billie Holiday Theatre (world premiere of *Brothers from the Bottom* by Jackie Alexander starring Wendell Pierce), The Culture

Project (*Speak Truth to Power* directed by Terry Kinney), Berkeley Repertory Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Huntington Theatre Company (co-production of *Ruined* directed by Liesl Tommy), Cleveland Playhouse (*Gee's Bend*), Virginia Stage Company (*Raisin in the Sun*), Weston Playhouse (*Raisin in the Sun* and "*Master Harold*"...and the Boys), Arkansas Rep. (*Fences*), Illinois Shakespeare Festival (*Julius Caesar*, *Pericles*, and *Comedy of Errors*), the Sundance Theatre Institute (workshops of *Skeleton Crew* and *Between the World and Me*). His TV credits include *The Good Fight*, *Madam Secretary*, *Elementary*, and *Law & Order*.

Alani iLongwe (P-Sam)

Alani iLongwe is excited to be making his Geffen Playhouse debut! Theater credits include *The Legend of Georgia McBride* (Ensemble Theatre Company), *Two Trains Running* (Seattle Repertory Theatre/Arena Stage), *Sunset Baby* (TheatreWorks), *Bad Apples* (ACT Theatre), *Romeo & Juliet* and *Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death* (Classical Theatre of Harlem). Television credits include ABC's *Castle*, TNT's *Major Crimes*, CBS' *Blue Bloods*, NBC's *Law & Order*, Nickelodeon's *Cousins for Life*, *Casagrandes*, and *The Loud House*. He can be heard voicing a series regular role in the upcoming Cartoon Network/HBO Max series *Jessica's Little Big World* and seen on screen in the Netflix feature film *Arthur the King* (starring Mark Wahlberg, Juliet Rylance, and Simu Liu). As a writer his immersive musical *At the River I Stand* is currently in development with Apples & Oranges Arts. Graduate of NYU's Tisch School for the Arts and Maggie Flanigan Studio. Ron Howard Fellowship recipient.

John Earl Jelks (Corn)

John can be seen in this season of the HBO Max series *Love Life*. In theater, John starred in *Head of Passes* at the Mark Taper Forum, reprising the role he originated alongside Phylicia Rashad and others in the Public Theater's production of the piece in 2016. John also appeared on Broadway in the critically acclaimed play *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage, which won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. In 2007, John received a Tony Award nomination for "Best Performance by a Featured Actor in a Play" for his work in August Wilson's *Radio Golf*. Additional film and television credits include Spike Lee's *Miracle at St. Anna*, *Night Comes On*, Showtime's *On Becoming a God in Central Florida*, Netflix's *The I-Land*, HBO's *True Detective*, Paramount+'s *The Good Fight*, *Blue Bloods* and NBC's *Law & Order: SVU*.

Shayna Small (Pumpkin)

Off-Broadway: *Parable of the Sower* (The Public Theater); *Rags Parkland Sings Songs of the Future* (Ars Nova workshop). Regional: *The Glorious World of Crowns, Kinks, and Curls* (Baltimore Center Stage); *How to Catch Creation* (Baltimore Center Stage & Philadelphia Theatre Company); *Buddy: The Buddy Holly Story* (Cincinnati Playhouse); *Intimate Apparel* (Bay Street Theatre); *The Colored Museum* (Huntington Theatre Company). The Juilliard School: *The Threepenny Opera*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Toya in Hurt Village*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *Henry IV (Part I)*, *Assassins*. Education: B.A., The Juilliard School. shaynasmall.com

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ABOUT GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

Geffen Playhouse has been a hub of the Los Angeles theater scene since opening its doors in 1995. Noted for its intimacy and celebrated for its world-renowned mix of classic and contemporary plays,

provocative new works and second productions, the not-for-profit organization continues to present a body of work that has garnered national recognition. Named in honor of entertainment mogul and philanthropist David Geffen, who made the initial donation to the theater, the company was founded by Gilbert Cates and is currently helmed by Executive Director Gil Cates, Jr., Artistic Director Matt Shakman and Board Chair Howard Tenenbaum. Proudly associated with UCLA, the Geffen welcomes an audience of more than 130,000 each year, and maintains extensive education and community engagement programs, designed to involve underserved young people and the community at large in the arts.

www.geffenplayhouse.org

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