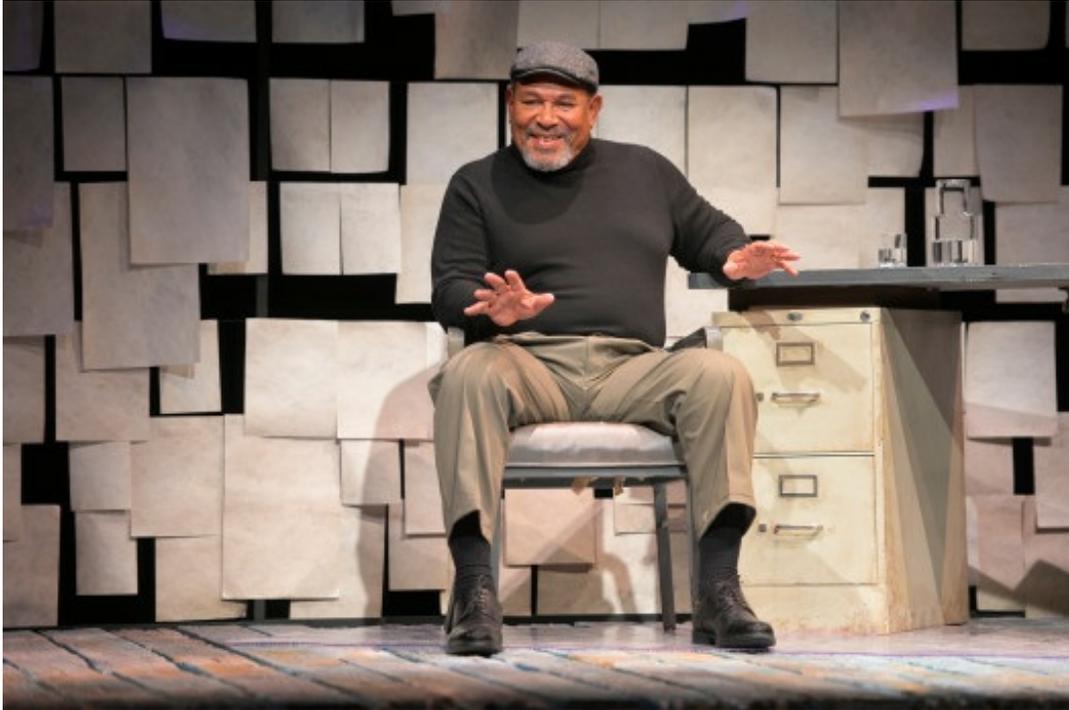


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February 7, 2019



Kevin Berne/August Wilson

Steven Anthony Jones plays legendary playwright August Wilson in the solo show “How I Learned What I Learned.”

By [Sam Hurwitt, Correspondent](#) |

PUBLISHED: February 8, 2019 at 10:00 am | UPDATED: February 8, 2019 at 10:16 am

Veteran local actor Steven Anthony Jones has a strong grounding in the work of playwright August Wilson, having worked on several on his plays over the years. Now he’s playing the playwright himself in “How I Learned What I Learned,” a delightful autobiographical one-man show that Wilson originally performed himself in 2003.

The Bay Area premiere of the show has emerged in a rare three-way co-production between Marin Theatre Company in Mill Valley, Lorraine Hansberry Theatre in San Francisco and Ubuntu Theater Project in Oakland. The first run at MTC closed Feb. 3 and now the show moves to SF’s Buriel Clay Theater for two weekends starting on Valentine’s Day, and then plays Mills

College in Oakland for another two weekends at the end of April. (Jones co-stars in the world premiere of Mfoniso Udofia's "In Old Age" at Magic Theatre between the San Francisco and Oakland runs of "How I Learned.")

Formerly a longtime core company member at American Conservatory Theater, Jones served for several years as artistic director for the Lorraine Hansberry, San Francisco's oldest African-American theater company, after the deaths of both its founders in 2010.

Jones met Wilson a couple of times before the playwright's death in 2005, first while working on "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" at ACT in 1989, in a co-production with the Lorraine Hansberry Theatre and Los Angeles Theatre Center. In 1995 Jones stepped in to take over a role he had been understudying in Wilson's "Seven Guitars" at ACT, as part of a string of regional theater productions on the show's way to Broadway.

Jones went on to perform in a couple of other installments in Wilson's epic 10-play American Century Cycle, each set in a different decade of the 20th century. In 2006 Jones was in "Gem of the Ocean" at ACT, and then in "Fences" at Marin Theatre Company opposite Margo Hall, his director for the current show.

"I think August Wilson is the best writer in the American theater in the 20th century," Jones says. "There are people who would argue otherwise, but I don't really think he has a peer in the American theater." Jones says he particularly appreciates "the authenticity of his characters and the majesty of the language. You say things that pretty much come from ordinary life in a way that is so poetic and powerful. And then the strength of his ideas. And I think he's a great storyteller."

Despite his long career in theater, Jones says this is only his second solo play, after LHT's 2015 production of "Thurgood" that Hall also directed. In "How I Learned What I Learned," he rattles off Wilson's personal anecdotes with compelling ease and assurance as if they were his own stories.

"You know, there's a lot of similarities between August and myself," Jones says. "We're about the same age. He was born in '45. I was born in '47. He grew up in Pittsburgh. I grew up in Cleveland. We were both artsy kids. And I've often thought if I had been in Pittsburgh growing up or he'd been in Cleveland, we'd have known each other. We'd gone to the same places. We might've tried to date the same girls. Every night you discover something else as you're working, and I said to my wife, I don't know if I'm finding August in me or me in August, but there's a lot in this play that just resonates for me personally. So I don't so much think about playing August. I just try to go out and commit myself to the truth of what he's saying."

Contact Sam Hurwitt at shurwitt@gmail.com, and follow him at [Twitter.com/shurwitt](https://twitter.com/shurwitt).

'HOW I LEARNED WHAT I LEARNED'

By August Wilson, presented by Lorraine Hansberry Theatre and Ubuntu Theater Project

When & where: Feb. 14-24, Buriel Clay Theater, 762 Fulton St., San Francisco;
Apr. 30-May 5, Rothwell Center Theater, Mills College, Oakland

Running time: One hour and 50 minutes, no intermission

