

# Backstage Pass with Lia Chang

## In the Rehearsal Room with Brandon J. Dirden, Crystal A. Dickinson, Willie Dirden, Brenda Pressley and More in Two River Theater's A RAISIN IN THE SUN

By LIA CHANG



Two River Theater's much anticipated production of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* is deep in rehearsal and I was invited to document a run thru on Saturday afternoon by director Carl Cofield.

Performances will begin in Two River's Rechnitz Theater, 21 Bridge Avenue, on Saturday, September 9 and continue for an extended four-week run, through Sunday, October 8. The opening night performance is Friday, September 15 at 7pm. Tickets are available from 732.345.1400 or [tworivertheater.org](http://tworivertheater.org). The lead production sponsor is Riverview Medical Center and the media partner is WBGO Jazz 88.3 FM.

The cast of *A Raisin in the Sun* includes Jasmine Batchelor (Beneatha Younger), Nat DeWolf (Karl Lindner), Crystal A. Dickinson (Ruth Younger), Brandon J. Dirden (Walter

Lee Younger), Willie Dirden (Bobo), Charlie Hudson III (Joseph Asagai), Brenda Pressley (Lena Younger), Owen Tabaka (Travis Younger), and York Walker (George Murchison). Andrew Binger and David Joel Rivera play the Moving Men.

The creative team includes scenic designers Christopher & Justin Swader, costume designer Elivia Bovenzi, lighting designer Kathy A. Perkins, Sound Designer Karin Graybash, and wigs designer Valerie Gladstone. The casting is by Jack Doulin + Sharky, and the stage manager is Lloyd Davis, Jr.

In this landmark drama, Hansberry-drawing on her own family's experience with housing discrimination-dramatizes the story of the Younger family, headed by matriarch Lena Younger, her son Walter Lee, and his wife, Ruth, who live (with other family members) in poverty on Chicago's south side. As the play begins, we see that Walter Lee, a chauffeur, dreams of what he might do with a long-promised life-insurance check, a legacy left to them to them by Lena's late husband.

We meet the Younger family on the day that their lives could change forever. Taking its title from a poem by Langston Hughes-"What happens to a dream deferred/Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?"-Hansberry's play explores the different hopes and aspirations of each member of the Younger family as they fight for their piece of the American Dream.

*A Raisin in the Sun* debuted in 1959 and was the first play by a black woman to be produced on Broadway. Produced at Two River for the first time in the theater's 24-year history, the play is Lorraine Hansberry's seminal masterpiece about race, social justice, and history-American history in the largest sense, and the personal histories of ordinary African-Americans.

"*A Raisin in the Sun* is not only one of America's greatest plays," says Artistic Director John Dias, "it is in fact one of the greatest works of art ever created. Lorraine Hansberry uses the metaphor of the family to illuminate something profound about who we are as Americans.

We have built this production around the talents of an extraordinary family of Two River actors: Brenda Pressley as Lena Younger; Brandon J. Dirden as Walter Lee Younger; and Brandon's wife, Crystal A. Dickinson, as Ruth Younger.

Joining them will be Brandon's father, Willie Dirden, as Bobo, making this the first time that father and son have acted together. Carl Cofield's production will resonate today as a story of how courage, hope and love trump our ongoing history of inequity and injustice."

Ticket prices range from \$40 to \$70, with discounts available for groups, seniors, and U.S. military personnel, their families, and veterans. A limited number of \$20 tickets are available for every performance; \$20 tickets may be partial view. Tickets for patrons under 30 are \$20 and include the best available seats at every performance. Tickets are available from [tworivetheater.org](http://tworivetheater.org) or 732.345.1400.

See all photos at: <https://backstagepasswithliachang.wordpress.com/2017/09/04/in-the-rehearsal-room-with-brandon-j-dirden-crystal-a-dickinson-willie-dirden-brenda-pressley-and-more-in-two-river-theaters-a-raisin-in-the-sun/>