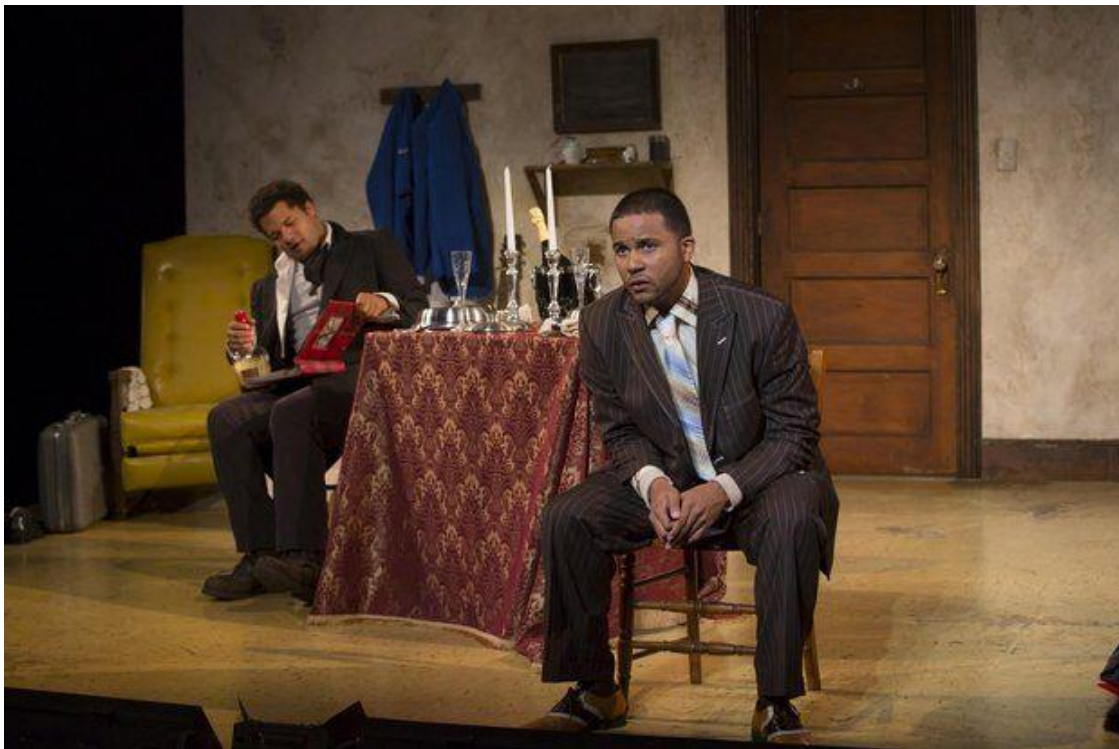


# The Star-Ledger

## Two River Theater stages Wilson, Sondheim and Shakespeare in 2015-16



Brandon J. Dirden (left, as Lincoln) and Jason Dirden (as Booth) in *Topdog/Underdog* at Two River Theater. The brothers will both take part in an upcoming production of "Seven Guitars" at the Red Bank venue. (T. Charles Erickson)

By Ronni Reich

High-profile productions of works by the unimpeachable trio of Shakespeare, Sondheim and August Wilson will take the stage at Two River Theater in its recently announced 2015-16 season.

The Red Bank venue opens with Wilson's "Seven Guitars," featuring the directorial debut of Brandon J. Dirden, one of the house's most compelling regular actors. The cast includes the director's brother Jason Dirden, whom Two River audiences may remember from his turn opposite Brandon in

"Topdog/Underdog," and Crystal Dickinson of Broadway's "You Can't Take It With You." Part of Wilson's "American Century Cycle," the play takes place in the 1940s and centers on a doomed blues guitarist. The show runs Sept. 12 through Oct. 4 and opens Sept. 18.

Next, Sondheim's "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" lightens the proceedings. Jessica Stone, who made an impressive showing at the helm of Ayckbourn's "Absurd Person Singular," returns to direct a cast that stars Christopher Fitzgerald of Broadway's "Wicked" as the cupid-playing slave Pseudolus, who covets freedom from his master in Ancient Rome. Denis Jones of "Honeymoon in Vegas" choreographs. Performances take place Nov. 14 through Dec. 13, and opening night is Nov. 20.

Two River founder Robert Rechnitz takes the spotlight in the new season as the co-author of "Lives of Reason," a world premiere set at an English department faculty party that deals with intellectual life as well as less cerebral passions. Kenneth Stunkel is the co-author, and Jonathan Fox directs a cast that includes John Ahlin and Maureen Silliman. The show runs Jan. 9 through Feb. 7 and opens Jan. 15.

The theater continues to champion Latino artists with "Ropes" by Bárbara Colio, which will be performed in English and Spanish Feb. 20 through March 20 with a Feb. 26 opening. Directed by Lisa Rothe, the play focuses on a famous tightrope walker and his estranged children.

The Bard's "Pericles," which chronicles the tumultuous life of the prince of Tyre, gets a new gloss with original music and additional lyrics by Pulitzer Prize finalist Rinde Eckert, who will appear in a production directed by David Schweitzer. Performances take place April 16 through May 8, with an April 22 opening.

The Transport Group's critically acclaimed production of John Van Druten's "I Remember Mama," starring 10 actors in 25 roles, visits Two River June 4 through 26 and opens June 10. Jack Cummings III directs the story of a working class Norwegian family starring Barbara Andres.

Maurice Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are" rounds out the season in a stage version originally adapted for Tag Theatre of Glasgow and produced by Vancouver's Presentation House Theatre. The fantastical show is recommended for children aged three to seven. Shows take place June 9 through 12.

Subscriptions are now on sale from \$83.25 to \$292.50, and single tickets, on sale in July, are \$20-\$65, at [tworivertheater.org](http://tworivertheater.org).