



The Cast of "A Raisin In The Sun" Shines Brightly On The Two River Theater Stage

By DOUG DOYLE · AUG 21, 2017

Director Carl Cofield and stars Brenda Pressley, Crystal A. Dickinson and Brandon J. Dirden join WBGO News Director Doug Doyle on the Joan and Robert Rechnitz Theater stage at Two River Theater in Red Bank, New Jersey



The cast of the upcoming Two River Theater production of "A Raisin In The Sun" and its director Carl Cofield share laughs with WBGO News Director Doug Doyle at the live audience event CREDIT CARMEN VALENTINE FOR WBGO

The latest production of Lorraine Hansberry's iconic play *A Raisin In The Sun* runs from September 9th through October 8th at Two River Theater in Red Bank, New Jersey. Several stars of the show including Brandon J. Dirden, Crystal A. Dickinson and Brenda Pressley and the play's director Carl Cofield joined *WBGO* News Director Doug Doyle on the stage at the Joan and Robert Rechnitz Theater for a live audience panel discussion to talk about the relevance of the play in today's world.

Carl Cofield says whenever he approaches a project he always how is this relevant to a 21st century audience?

"To me in a time where wealth and equality, civilness is on a low end and really having conversations and being able to talk to people, this is one of the most profound stories I've come into contact with. We look at a black family in a 360 degree holistic view." Cofield says the late playwright Lorraine Hansberry captured the conflicting ideas so beautifully in this piece.

"Fear, fear, courage, love, empathy, these are all the themes that resonate when I read the play and watch these amazing actors in rehearsal. And I think that's what we need more of, and to me that is the job of art, to hold that mirror up to society and ask these questions...for me it is What price do we pay? How deep is our love? How deep is our trust? What are the bonds that unite us? And we found out in rehearsal that this family has a wonderful elasticity so they can argue and pick at each other, they can go away from one another, but there are family. And the only that separated Ruth and Big Walter was the undertaker. What separates us a lot today are tweets. It's a much realer type of love that said if I'm with you to the end I'm with you til they wheel me away."



Cast members of "A Raisin In The Sun" pose for a photo following the live audience panel discussion at Two River Theater CREDIT CARMEN BALENTINE FOR WBGO

Crystal A. Dickinson plays Walter Lee Younger's wife Ruth in this production. She has great respect for the playwright too and the relevancy of *A Raisin in the Sun* today.

"Lorraine Hansberry considered herself not just a playwright but an activist. This play is an example of her activism. The question is What happens to a dream deferred? We are still asking that question. So I think that's the relevance that we're still asking that question."

Dickinson's husband in real life is the powerful actor Brandon J. Dirden who plays Walter Lee Younger. Dirden, a veteran of the Two River Theater stage, recently played "Booster" in August Wilson's *Jitney* on Broadway. Dirden says *A Raisin In The Sun* will always be relevant.

"The brilliance of Lorraine Hansberry to not just comment on a time, you know the 1950's in America, but she is really unearthing a deep truth about humanity. And any time you excavate the truths about humanity it will forever be relevant.....The truth that she excavates about race relations in America in this particular are unfortunately, yes, still timely.....I'm so happy that this play is so good that theaters want to present it."



Emotions ran high in the WBGO live event at Two River Theater CREDIT CARMEN BALENTINE FOR WBGO

The role of "Mama" or Lena Younger in the play is portrayed by Broadway and television actress Brenda Pressley. Doyle asked Pressley what "her" Lena Younger will bring to the stage?

"The role of Lena Younger is so brilliantly written, the text is right there. If you surrender your artistry to the beautiful words written to form this beautiful woman who is so universal....It is so humbling, exciting, intimidating all to play Lena Younger I would think for any actress, but she wears her race, gender, her role as mother as if there were a crown upon her head and majestic robes around her shoulders."

A portion of the interview will air August 26th on the *WBGO Journal* at 6am on *WBGO*, 88.3 FM and www.wbgo.org.