



THEATER

265 S. Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19107
Admin. Phone: 215.893.9456
Box-Office: 215.546.7824

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 2009

Press Contact:

Canary Promotion, 215.242.6393
Megan Wendell, megan@canarypromo.com

**High-resolution images available upon
request and online at:**

www.canarypromo.com/wilma

View the social media release:

<http://pitch.pe/25509>

The Wilma Theater Opens 09-10 Season with
Coming Home
by **Athol Fugard**
directed by **Blanka Zizka**
October 14 - November 15, 2009

PHILADELPHIA – The Wilma Theater opens its 2009-2010 Season with ***Coming Home***, the latest work by internationally acclaimed playwright **Athol Fugard** – the second most frequently produced playwright at the Wilma, following Tom Stoppard. The Wilma's production of *Coming Home*, directed by the Wilma's co-Artistic Director **Blanka Zizka**, is only the play's third production, after its premiere at New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre earlier this year.

In his latest play, Fugard, described as “the greatest active playwright in the English-speaking world” by *TIME Magazine*, crafts a moving tale of a young South African woman's never-ending hope for a better future. As a teenager, Veronica left her cherished grandfather's farm with aspirations of becoming a cabaret singer in Cape Town. Years later, she returns to her hometown with broken dreams, a painful secret, and the unflinching hope of building a new life for her young son.

Coming Home at the Wilma begins previews on **October 14**, opens on **October 21 (press night)**, and closes on **November 15, 2009**. Tickets start at \$36 and are available at the Wilma Box Office by calling **(215) 546-7824**, visiting 265 South Broad Street, or online at **www.wilmatheater.org**. Student tickets are available for \$10, depending on date and time, made possible through a grant from *PNC Arts Alive*.

The Wilma has previously produced four of Fugard's plays, beginning with *Statements After An Arrest Under the Immorality Act* in the 1987-1988 Season, followed by *The Road to Mecca*, *Playland*, and most recently *My Children! My Africa!*, also directed by Blanka Zizka in the 2006-2007 Season.

Fugard, now 76, first visited the Wilma in 1988, during Zizka's production of *Statements After An Arrest Under the Immorality Act*. He told the Wilma's Dramaturg and Literary Manager, Walter Bilderback, “I fell in love with Blanka's vision for her theater. Her understanding that good theater has to both educate and entertain the minds and hearts of her audience, is exactly what I strive for in my writing... How wonderful that *Coming Home* is going to find a home on the stage of the brave and courageous Wilma Theater.”

Zizka says she first became familiar with Fugard's work in the early 80s. "All of Athol's plays have always moved me to tears," Zizka says. "His characters seemed so alive and full of potential, but the ugliness of the world they inhabited, with its depraved laws, crawled into their souls and defeated them. Athol's plays show us that individual lives are not isolated from the society they live in. The policies and laws that may seem abstract and bureaucratic can horrendously disrupt the potential to lead a decent life."

Coming Home is a sequel to Fugard's mid-90s play *Valley Song*, an optimistic, hopeful play about South Africa's future. In *Coming Home*, Fugard revisits the character of Veronica, whom he describes as "a real young girl who I knew and who dreamt about going to the city, and I realized she could be an embodiment of the hope that we all had... But then, twelve years on, things have changed in South Africa."

"[*Valley Song*] expressed my — and I think the majority of South Africans' — hope that, with the fall of apartheid, we had entered a new world and that it was going to be a different story from now on," Fugard told *The Hartford Courant's* Frank Rizzo in a January 2009 interview. "Well, the truth is, as the years have passed, I have seen the dreams start to wither... South Africa just went into a state of total idiocy and madness that cost the lives of thousands of men, women and children... It just seemed to me, at this moment in South Africa's history, I needed to follow up and take a look at that big dream that we had."

Cast & Production Team

The Wilma's cast includes **Lou Ferguson** as Oupa Jonkers. Ferguson also portrayed Oupa in the world premiere of *Coming Home* and last appeared at the Wilma in *Playland*. His numerous credits include TV, film, regional theater, and Broadway credits such as *Seven Guitars*, *Two Trains Running*, and *Playboy of the West Indies*.

Veronica Jonkers is played by **Patrice Johnson**, whose Broadway credits include *The Crucible* and *Racing Demon*; regional credits include the role of Desdemona, opposite Patrick Stewart, in Shakespeare Theatre Company's *Othello*; in addition to several Off-Broadway, film and TV credits, including *Without a Trace*, *The Guardian*, and *ER*. Johnson is also the writer, director and producer of three independent feature films — *Kingcounty*, *Ny's Dirty Laundry*, and *Hill and Gully*.

Alfred Witbooi is played by **Nyambi Nyambi**, who has appeared on Broadway in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* at Lincoln Center Theater and Off-Broadway with Classic Stage Company, Classical Theatre of Harlem, and Partial Comfort Productions, among others.

Two young local actors will play the role of Veronica's son, Mannetjie. 10-year-old **Antonio J. Dandridge** will portray Mannetjie at age 9, and 9-year-old **Elijah Felder** will portray Mannetjie at age 5.

The set and costumes are designed by **Anne Patterson**, with lighting design by **Thom Weaver**, sound design by **Andrea Sotzing**, and original music composed by South African musician **Mogauwane Mahloele**.

About the playwright

Athol Fugard was born in 1932, in Middleburg, South Africa and was raised in Port Elizabeth. In 1953, after dropping out of the University of Cape Town, Fugard hitchhiked from South Africa to Sudan before signing on as the only white seaman on a merchant ship in the Far East, an experience he later explored in his play *The Captain's Tiger* (1998). Fugard wrote his first play, *No Good Friday*, in 1958. After his second play, *Blood Knot*, was produced in England and proved controversial, the playwright's passport was withdrawn for 4 years. In 1982, the Yale Repertory Theatre premiered one of Fugard's most recognized plays, *Master Harold...and the Boys*, a semi-autobiographical work later produced on Broadway. Fugard's novel *Tsotsi* (1980) was transformed into a movie that won the 2006 Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. Long Wharf Theatre will premiere his new work *Have You Seen Us?* later this year. Fugard will also direct the premiere of a new play in South Africa this year.

About the director

Blanka Zizka has been co-Artistic Director of The Wilma Theater since 1981. Zizka most recently directed Wajdi Mouawad's *Scorched* and Tom Stoppard's *Rock 'n' Roll*, which were both nominated for a combined total of 17 Barrymore Awards. Her 2008 production of *Eurydice* was nominated for 7 Barrymore Awards. Recently she directed the opera *Kát'a Kabanová* by Leoš Janáček for AVA, *Age of Arousal*, *The Life of Galileo*, *My Children! My Africa!*, Ariel Dorfman's *The Other Side* starring Rosemary Harris and John Cullum at Manhattan Theatre Club, *Cloud 9* by Caryl Churchill, *I Am My Own Wife* by Doug Wright, the World Premiere of *Raw Boys* by Dael Orlandersmith, *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train* by Stephen Adly Guirgis (Barrymore Winner, Best Overall Production and Best Director), the World Premiere of *Embarrassments* by Laurence Klavan and Polly Pen, and the Philadelphia Premieres of Lillian Groag's *The Magic Fire* and Chay Yew's *Red*. In 2002 she directed the World Premiere of Dael Orlandersmith's *Yellowman* at Manhattan Theatre Club, McCarter Theatre Center, Long Wharf Theatre, ACT in Seattle, and at The Wilma Theater. She was awarded the first Barrymore Award for Best Direction of a Play for Cartwright's *Road*.

Symposium Series

Sunday, October 25, 4:30 p.m.

Here, There and Everywhere: Global Health Concerns Gone Viral

Moderated by acclaimed Philadelphia bio-ethicist Arthur Caplan, Ph.D., this symposium will address global challenges posed by epidemic diseases, including the uncontrolled spread of AIDS in Africa.

Sunday, November 8, 4:30 p.m.

Tough Reality: Perspectives on post-apartheid South Africa

Moderated by the Wilma's Dramaturg and Literary Manager, Walter Bilderback, this symposium will examine contemporary South Africa from political to economic to health concerns, featuring noted panelists including Helen Epstein (author of *The Invisible Cure: Why We Are Losing The Fight Against AIDS in Africa*), Zolani Ngwane (Associate Professor of Anthropology at Haverford College), Alec Russell (World News Editor for the *Financial Times* and author of *Bring Me My Machine Gun: The Battle for the Soul of South Africa from Mandela to Zuma*), and Jonny Steinberg (author of *Sizwe's Cure*).

Symposium Tickets: FREE for all *Coming Home* ticket-holders, otherwise \$10. Seating is limited. For tickets, call the Box Office at (215) 546-7824 or email tickets@wilmatheater.org. Dates, times, and panelists are subject to change.

Subscriptions & Tickets

Subscription prices range from \$32-\$220, with Flex Subscriptions available that give subscribers the flexibility to choose performance dates over the season. Special discounts are available on single tickets for seniors, students, those in their 20s, and groups of 10 or more. Subscriptions and tickets are available by calling (215) 546-7824, visiting The Wilma Theater box office located at 265 South Broad Street in Philadelphia, or online at www.wilmatheater.org.

Reduced ticket pricing for students is made possible by *PNC Arts Alive*, a five-year, \$5 million investment from The PNC Foundation with the goal to increase engagement in the arts, develop new audiences and make the arts more accessible to diverse communities in the Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey region. In advance, students can save 50% off full-priced tickets (excludes Opening and Saturday nights) and purchase \$10 tickets for Sunday evening performances. Tickets for same day performances can be purchased for \$10 at the Box Office. Tickets are subject to availability; valid student ID is required; limit one ticket per ID.

The Wilma Theater will continue its 2009-2010 Season with the Philadelphia Premiere of ***Becky Shaw*** by Gina Gionfriddo (December 30, 2009 – January 31, 2010), the World Premiere of ***Language Rooms*** by Youssef El Guindi (March 3 - April 4, 2010), and the U.S. Premiere of ***Leaving*** by Václav Havel (May 19 - June 20, 2010).

The Wilma Theater's Symposium Series is supported by The Wallace Foundation Excellence Award grant. The Wallace Foundation Excellence Awards were created to support exemplary arts organizations to pioneer effective practices to engage more people in high-value arts activities.

Peco is the Building the Audiences of Tomorrow production sponsor. Sporting Club at the Bellevue is a Season Sponsor.

#

Press Contact: Megan Wendell, Canary Promotion, 215.242.6393, megan@canarypromo.com

Coming Home FACTS

<p>Performances:</p> <p>Wed, 10/14 7:30pm Thu, 10/15 7:30pm Fri, 10/16 8:00pm Sat, 10/17 8:00pm Sun, 10/18 2:00pm</p> <p>Tue, 10/20 6:30pm Wed, 10/21* 7:30pm Thu, 10/22+ 7:30pm Fri, 10/23 8:00pm Sat, 10/24 2:00pm Sat, 10/24 8:00pm Sun, 10/25 2:00pm Sun, 10/25 7:30pm</p> <p>Wed, 10/28 7:30pm Thu, 10/29+ 7:30pm Fri, 10/30 8:00pm Sat, 10/31 2:00pm Sat, 10/31 8:00pm Sun, 11/1 2:00pm Sun, 11/1 7:30pm</p> <p>Wed, 11/4 7:30pm Thu, 11/5 7:30pm Fri, 11/6 8:00pm Sat, 11/7 2:00pm Sat, 11/7 8:00pm Sun, 11/8 2:00pm Sun, 11/8 7:30pm</p> <p>Tue, 11/10 6:30pm Wed, 11/11+ 2:00pm Wed, 11/11 7:30pm Thu, 11/12 7:30pm Fri, 11/13# 8:00pm Sat, 11/14^ 2:00pm Sat, 11/14 8:00pm Sun, 11/15 2:00pm</p>	<p>Dates: October 14 – November 15, 2009 Previews run October 14 – 20 Opening night is Wednesday, Oct. 21</p> <p>Theater: The Wilma Theater 265 S. Broad Street (Broad and Spruce) Philadelphia, PA 19107</p> <p>Prices: Tickets start at \$36 Rush tickets are: \$25 (Sun. – Thu. & Sat. matinees) \$30 (Fri. & Sat. evenings)</p> <p>Student tickets are available for \$10, depending on date and time, made possible through a grant from PNC Arts Alive.</p> <p>Special discounts are available for seniors, students, and groups of 10 or more.</p> <p>Tickets: Phone: (215) 546-7824, Fax: (215) 893- 0895 Online: www.wilmatheater.org E-mail: tickets@wilmatheater.org In person: 265 S. Broad Street The Box Office is open Monday-Friday from 10:30 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. During production, the box office is also open Saturdays and Sundays from 12:00 p.m. to curtain.</p> <hr/> <p>Coming Home by Athol Fugard directed by Blanka Zizka</p> <p>Cast (in alphabetical order) Antonio J. Dandridge Manneljie, age 9 Elijah Felder Manneljie, age 5 Lou Ferguson Oupa Jonkers Patrice Johnson Veronica Jonkers Nyambi Nyambi Alfred Witbooi</p> <p>Production Team Anne Patterson Set & Costume Designer Thom Weaver Lighting Designer Andrea Sotzing Sound Designer Mogauwane Mahloele Music Composition Patreshettarlini Adams Stage Manager</p>
--	---

*Opening Night ^Captioned Performance +Post-show chats
 #Pre-show wine tasting with Tria, 7–8pm

#

Press Contact: Megan Wendell, Canary Promotion, 215.242.6393, megan@canarypromo.com