

ALLEY THEATRE

Meredith J. Long Theatre Center | 615 Texas Avenue | Houston, Texas 77002

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Alley Theatre Announces Programming Supported by an Our Town Award from the National Endowment for the Arts

Houston celebrates the legacy of August Wilson

HOUSTON, TX—Alley Theatre is pleased to announce its programming supported by an Our Town Award from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Our Town is the NEA creative placemaking program, investing in projects where arts, culture, and design foster community connection, local identity, and equitable development. The Alley initiative will engage residents, artists, educators, and preservationists in reclaiming historic Houston spaces as hubs for learning, creativity, and collective memory, while building sustainable collaborations among cultural and community institutions.

“There are so many reasons why I’m excited about Alley Theatre’s NEA Our Town award, which supports readings of three August Wilson plays in spaces across Houston beyond the Alley’s walls,” shares Alley Theatre Artistic Director **Rob Melrose**. “August Wilson wrote ten plays in his Century Cycle, all of which are excellent and worth seeing! While there are many opportunities to see his most popular plays like the Alley’s recent production of August Wilson’s *Fences*, I’m excited to give Houston audiences the chance to fall in love with his plays that aren’t produced as often. I also love any program that reaches Houston audiences outside of our building. It is our goal to serve all of Houston and programs like these help spread the Alley’s mission to all.”

“This award is the opportunity to create community-centered programming that connects local artists, culture workers, and community voices across generations,” shares Alley Theatre Community Engagement Specialist **Russell Boyd**. “August Wilson’s legacy bridges art, history, place, and lived experience, and through this work, we create spaces where Houstonians can see themselves in these stories, connect more deeply with the histories that shape our city, and carry that history forward through art and storytelling.”

The NEA Our Town award supports a two-year partnership between Alley Theatre, The Ensemble Theatre, the Rutherford B.H. Yates Museum, the Mayor’s Office of the Arts and the City of Houston to activate Freedmen’s Town and other historic Houston districts through the arts. Running January 2026–June 2027, the project uses theatre, storytelling, and place-based programming to strengthen community identity, foster collaboration, and highlight Houston’s historic Black neighborhoods as national centers of cultural resilience and vibrancy.

Programming includes:

- **Staged Readings:** Community-based staged readings of August Wilson’s *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone*, *Gem of the Ocean*, and *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, presented in historic Black communities and culturally significant venue spaces. These readings will explore themes of heritage, migration, gentrification, home, identity, memory, and cultural legacy.

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- **Public Programs & Workshops:** Place-based activations centered on Freedmen's Town and other local historic cultural sites; collaborations with local artists, creators, students, educators, cultural workers, preservation workers, and local institutions; and activities such as site-based storytelling, performance and writing workshops, community discussions, panels, screenings, community performances, sound activations, museum exhibitions, and visual art exhibitions.
- **Arts Education Residencies:** A curated series of workshops held in schools and community spaces using a universal design for learning model. These theatre-based workshops will engage students and community members' visual and performance art.
- **Placemaking & Preservation Work:** Exhibitions, arts education activities, and community resources centered on placemaking, cultural preservation, community preservation, and the history of Freedmen's Town and other historic Houston communities.

ABOUT ALLEY THEATRE:

Alley Theatre, one of America's leading nonprofit theatres, is a nationally recognized performing arts company led by Artistic Director Rob Melrose and Managing Director Jennifer Bielstein. The Alley is committed to developing and producing theatre that is as diverse as the Houston community. The Alley produces up to 11 plays and nearly 400 performances each season, ranging from the best current work and classic plays to new plays by contemporary writers. Home to a full-time resident company of actors and expert artisans in all theatre crafts, the Alley engages theatre artists of every discipline—actors, directors, designers, composers, playwrights—who work on individual productions throughout each season as visiting artists.

Alley Theatre performs at the Meredith J. Long Theatre Center which is comprised of two state-of-the-art theatres: the 774-seat Hubbard Theatre and the 296-seat Neuhaus Theatre. The Alley reaches over 200,000 people each year through its performance, education, and community engagement programs.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT OF THE ARTS:

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), established in Congress in 1965, is an independent federal agency that is the largest funder of the arts and arts education in communities nationwide and a catalyst of public and private support for the arts. By advancing opportunities for arts participation and practice, the NEA fosters and sustains an environment in which the arts benefit everyone in the United States.

The NEA is the only arts funder in the United States—public or private—that provides access to the arts in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. jurisdictions. Our work extends into communities of all sizes across America through a vast network that includes artists, arts workers, audiences, learners, and organizations at the local, state-wide, regional, and national levels.

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