

August Wilson classic tells many 'lessons'

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Playwright August Wilson's vast body of work has earned him a roomful of awards and the distinction as one of the best writers of his generation. "The Piano Lesson" is one of the plays that helped make Wilson a household name.



August Wilson

The Black Spectrum Theatre has generated quite a bit of buzz of its own right since debuting its production of the play in New York late last year. The theater is hoping for the same kind of response here when it puts on the play at the National Black

Theatre Festival.

"The Piano Lesson" focuses on the Charleses, a black working class family living in Pittsburgh with deep Southern roots. The center of the story is a majestic, and antiquated, piano that sits in the living room of Berniece Charles. The piano is the family's most prized possession because it has roots



"The Piano Lesson" revolves around a dispute between family members over whether or not to sell a piano that has been in the family for many years.

that tie it to the family's slave ancestors.

The play's conflict starts when Berniece's

brother, Boy Willie, visits from down South with a plan to buy land that the family's



Venue:

WFLU's Proscenium Theatre

Schedule: Aug. 8 at 8 p.m.;

Aug. 9 at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Price:

\$35

ancestors had once worked as slaves. The catch is that he has to sell the piano in order to get enough money to make the purchase. His sister strongly opposes selling the heirloom.

The family's struggle leads to a dialogue that raises thought-provoking questions about blacks' fight to hold onto the past while trying to survive and get ahead in the present. August Wilson won his second Pulitzer Prize for "The Piano Lesson." He also has a Pulitzer for "Fences."

Bette Howard directs the Black Spectrum Theatre's production.

Profile: Ben Vereen, Living Legend recipient

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

Ben Vereen will receive a Living Legend Award during the NBTF Opening Night Gala on Aug. 4. Born in Miami, Vereen, in recent years, has starred as The Chimney Man in the musical "Jelly's Last Jam." Vereen made a name for himself on the stage by starring in such classics as "Sweet Charity," "Hair," and "Jesus Christ Superstar." He won a Tony and Drama Desk Award for Best Actor in a Musical for "Pippin."

Vereen also starred in the Broadway musical "Grind" and in the San Francisco production of "I'm Not Rappaport." Herb Gardner's poignant, Tony Award-winning comedy about aging in America. Most recently, Vereen graced the Broadway stage starring as The Ghost of Christmas Present in the Madison Square Garden production of "A Christmas Carol" to outstanding reviews.

Although he has appeared on television shows such as "Touched by an Angel," "Second Noah," "The Nanny," "New York Undercover," "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air," and "Star Trek - The Next Generation," he is best known for the groundbreaking television miniseries, "Roots." Vereen played Chicken George in the Emmy Award-winning

miniseries "Roots." Vereen also has appeared in "The Jesse Owens Story," and the CBS mini-series, "Ellis Island."



Vereen

for which he received a Golden Globe nomination.

His films include, "All That Jazz," "Funny Lady," "Why Do Fools Fall in Love?"

and "The Painting."

Live audiences have been transfixed by Vereen's dancing and singing. He has a one-man show that continues to draw huge crowds in places such as Las Vegas and Atlantic City. The American Guild of Variety Artists awarded Vereen three of its highest honors: Entertainer of the Year, Song and Dance Star, and Rising Star.

Be there as Tony-winning actress Tonya Pinkins opens 'Pandora's Box'

Pinkins appeared in 'All My Children,' 'Jelly's Last Jam'

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

The National Black Theater Festival and New Shoes Entertainment have teamed up to present "Pandora's Trunk," an original play written by Blaine Teamer. Billed as a one-woman show, "Pandora's Trunk" stars newcomer Indira Gibson and veteran stage and Tony Award-winning actress Tonya Pinkins, playing her "voice" of conscience.

The play is a fantasy journey of an adopted woman's search to discover her birth mother's identity through the person-

al things left inside the trunk. A take on the Greek myth Pandora's box, the writer explores the theme of dealing with the consequences of unleashing the unknown.

The play is directed by Ché Rae Adams and produced by Stephanie Harris-Byers of New Shoes Entertainment.

Gibson was elevated to the lead, having received accolades and outstanding reviews from the L.A. Times, Variety and L.A. Weekly.

Pinkins joined the production especially for the presentation at the National Black Theatre Festival. A Broadway veteran who won the Tony for "Jelly's Last Jam," Pinkins spent nine years in daytime television on "All My Children" and "As the World Turns." She will next appear in the title role of the contemporary opera "Caroline or Change" at the New York Public Theater this fall.



Pinkins



Venue:

Sawtooth Center

Schedule:

Aug. 7 at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.;
Aug. 8 at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.; Aug. 9
at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Price:

\$35 (includes performance of
Euripides' Medea)