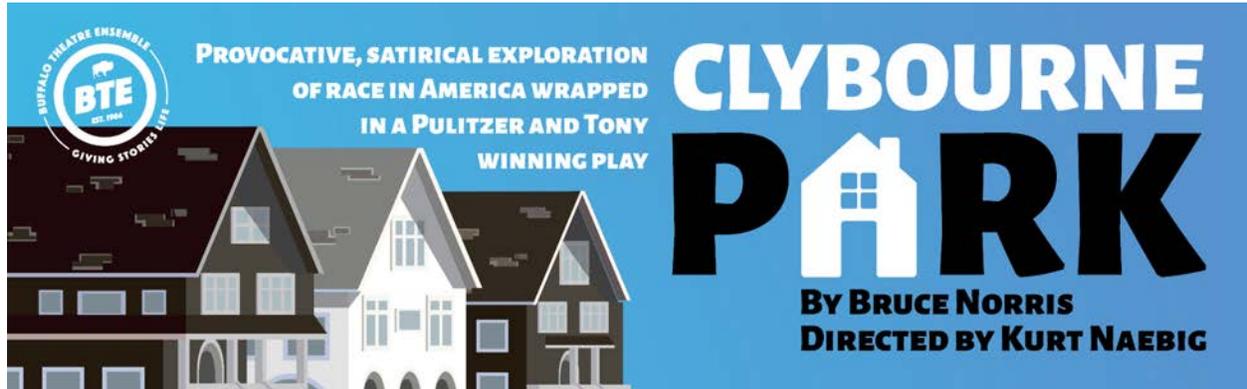


Buffalo Theatre Ensemble Presents:



Sep. 8 - Oct. 9 | Thu-Sat, 8p • Sun, 3p

Inspired by Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin In The Sun*, *Clybourne Park* is a provocative comedy/drama set in the same house fifty years apart in the suburbs of Chicago. Act one takes place in 1959 when Russ and Bev are moving to the suburbs – selling their home to the neighborhood's first black family. Act two is decades later when a young white couple buys the same property with plans to demolish and build a larger home. Now a predominantly black community battles to protect the historic qualities of the community in the face of gentrification.

Buffalo Theatre Ensemble sincerely thanks the College of DuPage Library for research support for classes studying the script and production, as well as for the cast, director and production team, working on the project.

Time, Place and Characters

ACT 1 - 1959 Chicago

Russ

Bev (married to Russ)

Francine

Jim

Albert (married to Francine)

Karl

Betsy

ACT 2 - 2009 Chicago

Tom (played by actor who played Jim)

Lindsey (played by actor who played Betsy)

Kathy (played by the actor who played Bev)

Steve (married to Lindsey; played by the actor who played Karl)

Lena (played by the actor who played Francine)

Kevin (married to Lena; played by the actor who played Albert)

Dan (played by the actor who played Russ)

Kenneth (played by the actor who played Jim)

Director's Note:

Bruce Norris' play *Clybourne Park* has got heart, a reason, guts, outrageous comedy and the ability to surprise people and leave them talking about what they saw as they leave the theatre and head home.

Norris, known for his willingness to skewer everybody and everything, brings his finest writing to this Tony and Pulitzer prize winning show.

The writer, who says he first experienced the 20th century classic *A Raisin In The Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry in a 7th grade classroom, sets his show in the very house that Hansberry's family "the Youngers" have just purchased. Except now we are seeing it from the other side.

50 years later the house gets sold again and we are back on the inside again.

Each time I read *Clybourne Park*, I come away with something wholly different. That is a hallmark of great theater. And something that needs to be shared. Welcome...and enjoy the ride. KN

Sidney Poitier and cast in scene from 1959 production of *A Raisin In The Sun*.



A Raisin in the Sun: Inspiring Clybourne Park

Reprinted from
<https://issuu.com/milwaukeeerep/docs/clybourne-studyguide>

Clybourne Park responds to one of the most celebrated plays in American drama: *A Raisin in the Sun*. Playwright Bruce Norris directly connects the two plays. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the Younger family buys a house in the Clybourne Park neighborhood. *Clybourne Park* takes place in that house.

When Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* opened on Broadway in 1959, it became the first play by an African-American woman to do so. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the New York Drama Critic Circle Award for Best New Play, and was nominated for four Tony awards. On the 25th anniversary of the play, the New York Times called *A Raisin in the Sun* the play that "changed American theater forever."

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, five family members share a small, three-room apartment – Lena (Mama) Younger, her daughter Beneatha, her son Walter Lee, Walter's wife Ruth, and their son Travis. When Mama receives a life insurance check after her husband's death, each member of the family argues it should be used to

further their own individual dreams. Eventually, Mama decides to use the money as a down payment for a house with enough room for the entire family. With their own house, she sees a bright future for her family.

The house is located in Clybourne Park, an entirely white neighborhood. When the residents of Clybourne Park learn that an African-American family bought the house, they send Karl Lindner, a representative from the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, to visit the family. He offers them money in exchange for not moving into the neighborhood. However, Lindner fails to convince the family, and, refusing the money, the optimistic Youngers move to Clybourne Park.

In the original New York Times review of the play, Brook Atkinson noted:

“In *A Raisin in the Sun* ... Lorraine Hansberry touches on some serious problems. No doubt, her feelings about them are as strong as anyone’s. But she has not tipped her play to prove one thing or another. The play is honest. She has told the inner as well as the outer truth about a Negro family in the South Side of Chicago at the present time ... That is Miss Hansberry’s personal contribution to an explosive situation in which simple honesty is the most difficult thing in the world. And also the most illuminating”

Lorraine Hansberry believed in finding the universal through the specific saying, “one of the most sound ideas in dramatic writing is that, in order to create the universal, you must pay very great attention to the specific.” In a 1961 interview on *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry elaborated:

“I don’t think there is anything more universal in the world than man’s oppression of man. This is what most great dramas have been about, no matter what the device of telling it is. We tend to think, because it is so immediate with us in the United States, that this is a unique human question where white people do not like black people ... but the fact of the matter is wherever there are men, there are oppressed people and ... to the extent that my work is successful piece of drama it makes it a reality of this oppression true.

The Playwright:



Bruce Norris

Excerpts from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Norris_\(playwright\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Norris_(playwright))

After graduating from Northwestern University in 1982 with a degree in theater, Norris set out to become an actor. He performed at Victory Gardens Theater, the Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre and on Broadway. His Broadway acting credits include David Hirson's *Wrong Mountain* (January to February 2000), Wendy Wasserstein's *An American Daughter* (April to June 1997), and Neil Simon's *Biloxi Blues* (March 1985 to June 1986).

During this time he was also "hired and fired from a number of television pilots." These rejections led to writing his first play, *The Actor Retires*, produced in a late-night venue in Chicago in 1991 and then as a radio play for later broadcast by WFMT-FM as part of the Guest Quarters Hotel's series *Chicago Theatres on the Air* in 1992.

The Steppenwolf Theatre has produced the last seven of Norris' plays.

Purple Heart was produced at the Steppenwolf Theatre from July 5, 2002 to August 25, 2002, with direction by Anna D. Shapiro and featuring Laurie Metcalf and Rosemary Prinz. The play relates the story of a Vietnam War widow and was commissioned by Steppenwolf.

We All Went Down to Amsterdam was produced at the Steppenwolf Theatre from June 12, 2003 to July 13, 2003, directed by Amy Morton.

The Pain and the Itch was produced at Steppenwolf Theatre from June 30 to August 28, 2005, directed by Anna D. Shapiro, with the cast that featured Jayne Houdyshell, Tracy Letts and Kate Arrington. It then was produced Off-Broadway

at Playwrights Horizons from September 21, 2006 to October 15, 2006, directed by Shapiro, and at the Royal Court Theatre, London in June to July 2007. *The Guardian* (London) reviewer called the play "...social satire, in the style of Jules Feiffer, ... very funny." The play takes place at Thanksgiving at an upper-middle-class family's home. This was the fourth play by Norris that Steppenwolf had produced.

The Unmentionables ran at Steppenwolf Downstairs Theatre from June 29 to August 27, 2006, directed by Anna D. Shapiro. The play takes place in Africa. The play was produced at Yale Repertory Theater in May 2007, also directed by Shapiro. Charles Isherwood, in his review in *The New York Times*, called it an "acidic satire of bourgeois venality and hypocrisy."

A Parallelogram was produced at Steppenwolf Downstairs Theatre from July 1 through August 29, 2010, directed by Anna D. Shapiro. The cast featured Marylouise Burke, Tim Bickel, Kate Arrington and Tom Irwin. In an article for Steppenwolf, Marti Lyons writes about the theme of the play: "what do we do after we know the truth about ourselves? If we rid ourselves of all self-deception, how well can we function in the world? Is some self-protective illusion useful?" *A Parallelogram* opened Off-Broadway at Second Stage Theatre's Tony Kiser Theatre on August 2, 2017. Directed by Michael Grief, the cast features Celia Keenan-Bolger, Anita Gillette, Stephen Kunken and Juan Castano.

Domesticated had its world premiere Off-Broadway at the Lincoln Center Mitzi E. Newhouse Theater, running from October 10, 2013 (previews) to January 5, 2014. Directed by Anna D. Shapiro, the cast starred Laurie Metcalf and Jeff Goldblum. The play was commissioned by Lincoln Center Theater, and involves a political couple following a public embarrassment.

His play *The Qualms* premiered Off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizons, running from May 22 to July 12, 2015. Directed by Pam MacKinnon, the cast featured Donna Lynne Champlin, Noah Emmerich and Kate Arrington. The play was initially produced at Steppenwolf Theater in July and August 2014, also directed by MacKinnon.

The Low Road premiered Off-Broadway at the Public Theater on February 13, 2018. Directed by Michael Grief, it featured Tessa Albertson, Max Baker, Kevin Chamberlin, Daniel Davis, Crystal A. Dickinson, Gopal Divan, Harriet Harris, Jack

Hatcher, Chukwudi Iwuji, Johnny Newcomb, Chris Perfetti, Susannah Perkins, Richard Poe, Dave Quay, Aaron Ray, Joseph Soeder, and Danny Wolohan.

Clybourne Park

On April 18, 2011, Norris was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play *Clybourne Park*. The Prize committee citation described the play as "a powerful work whose memorable characters speak in witty and perceptive ways to America's sometimes toxic struggle with race and class consciousness." Prior to its Pulitzer award, the play won the Olivier Prize for "Best New Play", after being produced at the Royal Court Theatre in London in August 2010.

The play premiered Off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizons on February 21, 2010 and on Broadway at the Walter Kerr Theatre on April 19, 2012, and won the Tony Award for Best Play following its Pulitzer win. Directed by Pam MacKinnon, the cast featured Frank Wood, Annie Parisse, Jeremy Shamos, Crystal A. Dickinson, Brendan Griffin, Damon Gupton and Christina Kirk.

It is one of two plays to win the Pulitzer, Tony, and Olivier, the other being David Mamet's drama *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

Below are a few excerpts from an Interview with Bruce Norris during the run of *Clybourne Park* at the Royal Court Theatre. Copyright: Royal Court Education Background Pack, compiled by Rebecca Manson Jones.

Where did the idea of recreating Karl Lindner and the characters of Lorraine Hansberry's play as off-stage shadows come from?

A Raisin in the Sun was one of the first important American plays I was exposed to - via the movie - and it wasn't long after that experience that I started working as a child actor. I was fascinated by how plays work, not only structurally but also with sets, costumes, and so forth. The Hansberry play is so solidly built a play that it was a good starting point. My problem, though, was that since I was a privileged little white boy in Houston, TX, I didn't have any easy way to relate to the characters... except the character of Karl, the antagonist. At the same time, as I became an actor I quickly found that the best parts, perversely, are always the ones that arouse the audience's negative reactions. So, since my access to

the story of Raisin was only through the side door, so to speak, I thought it would be interesting to allow this character to escape from the play, like a refugee, and run off to drop in on another story - one intimately connected with A Raisin in the Sun.

Do you think you would always have been a “political” or socially engaged writer or you think these particular times we live in have compelled you to write/choose these subjects?

I'm not really sure I am politically or socially engaged, by which I mean, I don't think that plays lead to political change of any profound kind. I often write about people within a given political milieu (or affected by one), because I find the questions raised to be interesting to me personally. But I certainly don't think that the plays I write foment change, but I do like to ask myself why we believe certain things about ourselves, politically speaking, usually self-flattering things. But that's just part of my argumentative nature. So I think I probably would be the same kind of writer no matter what political era I was born into.

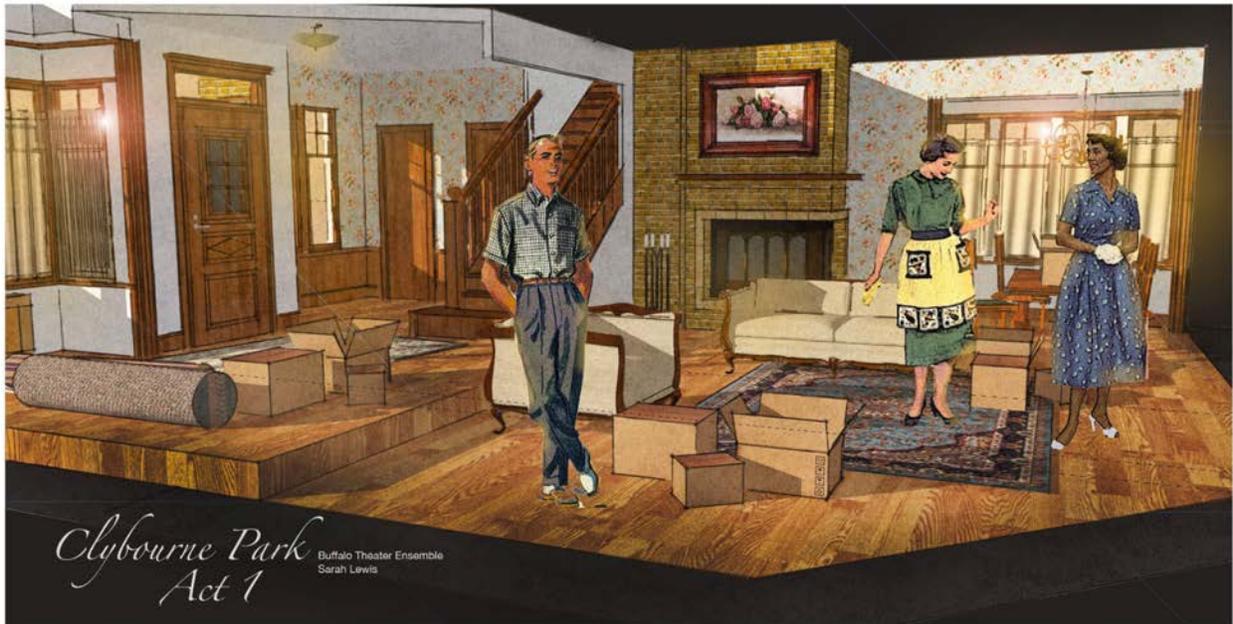
Something I particularly like about the play is that it doesn't tell us what to think – and anytime you might think “oh I agree with him/her” something else happens to question it. How did you manage to get yourself into so many heads at once? Is this the actor background coming through again?

Yeah, again, it's multiple improvisation, and a deep aversion to preaching to people. Whenever people come to hear "politics" in the theatre it is inevitably to reconfirm their pre-existing beliefs and pat themselves on the back - which for me is not that interesting

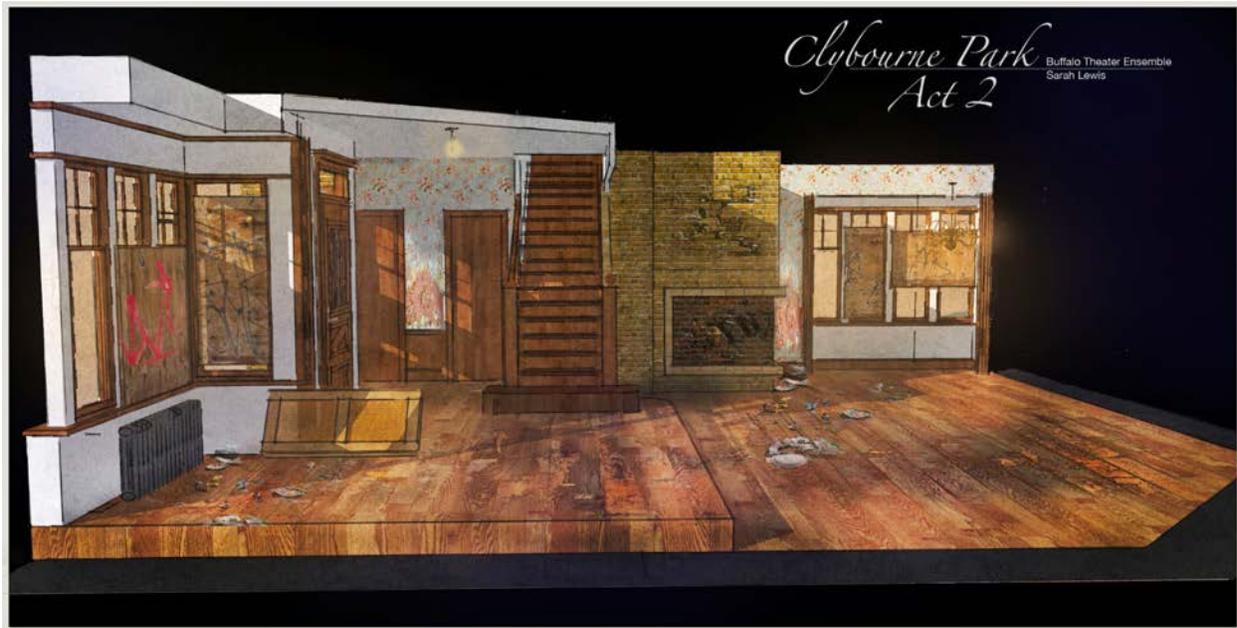
There are a lot of laughs in the play – but is it a comedy? Do you want audiences to take anything else from it?

Without trying to sound too precious - I think a play is whatever it is. We don't ask whether a book or a painting is a comedy or a tragedy - those are just some categories that a critic named Aristotle made up. And I think people take away whatever they put in - I've had a more profound experience watching certain Bugs Bunny cartoons than I have at some Shakespeare plays.

Buffalo Theatre Ensemble's *Clybourne Park* Rendering by Set Designer Sarah Lewis
Act 1 - 1959



Act 2 - 2009



Things to think about prior to the performance:

- What does “Home” mean to you? How about “Community”? How would you describe your “Neighborhood”?
- How do you welcome someone new to your community? Is it difficult or easy to include someone who is different from you in your community? Please explain.
- Language can be very powerful. Explain some of the ways that language has power.
- How do you approach talking about controversial subjects?

Things to watch for in performance:

- What was most surprising and or interesting about the designs for this production?
- How do the lights, sound and set make you feel?

- How did the actors, all of whom play more than one character, make the characters distinct and clear?

Things to think about after the performance:

- Why might Chicago be a good place to set the play?
- Why do you think the playwright chose to set Act One in 1959 and Act Two in 2009?

Other Analysis Tools:

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, what happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is 'about?' In a nutshell, how does the playwright drive their point(s) home?
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwright decide that this was the most quintessential title for his work, do you think?

The running time for this production is approximately 2 hours, including a 15 minute intermission.

Please join us for a pre-show discussion Thursday, September 8th at 6:45p.m in MAC 140 preceding the preview performance. Note that pre-show discussions will include the director and designers, and will be a discussion of the approach to this production.

Also, there will be a free showing of the filmed 1961 version of *A Raisin in the Sun*, with a brief post discussion on 9/14 in the Playhouse of the MAC.

There will be a post-show discussion following the Friday, September 16th performance. The post-show will be with the director, cast and crew, and we will be fielding questions from the audience.

There will be an ASL interpreted performance on Thursday, September 29.

Please join us!

<https://www.atthemacs.org/events/clybourne-park/>