



## **BWW Interview: Chante Adams in August Wilson's MA RAINEY'S BLACK BOTTOM at TRT 9/10 to 10/9**

By Marina Kennedy

Two River Theater (TRT) under the leadership of Artistic Director John Dias and Managing Director Michael Hurst, launches its 2016/17 Season with an extended four-week run of August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* from September 10th through October 9th. Directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* is the fourth play in Wilson's American Century Cycle produced by Two River, following *Jitney*, *Two Trains Running* and *Seven Guitars*.

Wilson's incendiary drama, set in the 1920s, takes audiences into the world of legendary singer Ma Rainey (the real-life "Mother of the Blues") as she lays down tracks with her band in a Chicago recording studio. The cast includes Chanté Adams, Harvy Blanks, Brian D. Coats, Michael Cumpsty, Brandon J. Dirden, Bob Mackasek, Marcel Spears, Peter Van Wagner, ArneTia Walker, and James A. Williams. Broadwayworld.com interviewed Chanté Adams who will play Dussie Mae in the show.



Chanté Adams is overjoyed to be a part of this production of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. She recently graduated from Carnegie Mellon University and is a Detroit native. Her past credits include *Antony and Cleopatra*, *In a Word*, and *Gertrude Stein SAINTS!*. She was cast as the lead in the upcoming feature *Roxanne*, *Roxanne*-a film based on hip-hop legend Roxanne Shanté from producers Forest Whitaker and Pharrell Williams.

### **When were you first introduced to the world of theatre?**

My first introduction to theatre began my first day of freshman year at Cass Technical High School. I auditioned for a student directed production just because a friend of mine

was auditioning. Since it was the very first day of high school she was the only person in the class that I knew, and her leaving meant I wouldn't have anyone to talk to so I followed her into the black box theatre to wait for her to get done. My then drama teacher/now life time mentor, Marilyn McCormick, told me I had to audition if I was going to sit in there so I did...and now here I am!

**Who have been career inspirations for you?**

I consider any woman of color who is making art, breaking down barriers, and giving back a career inspiration for myself. Women like Ava Duverney, Liesel Tommy, Phylicia Rashad, Angela Bassett, and Regina Hall-just to name a few.

**Tell us a little about your Carnegie Mellon University experience.**

CMU was a very intense and rewarding program. My journey at CMU began in the summer of 2011 when I attended their 6 week pre college program before my senior year of high school. I fell in love with the school, the teachers, the community and realized it was my dream school so I was overjoyed a few weeks later when I found out that I had received early admittance based off my work during pre-college. These last 4 years have been challenging. Lots of long hours, sweat, and tears but I got to make art that I was passionate about, learn how to better myself as a person and as an actor, and create life long bonds with my professors and classmates. Going into my first professional production right out of school, I am prepared and confident that I can hold my own with this amazingly talented cast and I owe that to CMU.

**What advice do you have for other young aspiring actors?**

Just because you start accomplishing your goals doesn't mean you stop reaching. Keep striving, keep believing, keep dreaming, in fact- dream bigger!

**How do you like working at TRT?**

I love the community and family that TRT has created here in Red Bank. They are so welcoming to new comers like myself and are more than happy to have returning members come "home". The sense of community extends past the cast and goes all the way to the crew, producers, box office personnel etc. The amount of support that comes from the people involved in the production and the theatre is overwhelming and I couldn't be more grateful to be apart of it.

**What have been some of the challenges of your role as Dussie Mae.**

At first glance, Dussie Mae is perceived as asinine and naive but Ruben and I have chosen to highlight her power. Dussie Mae is a prime example of someone who uses what they have to get what they want. She uses her sensuality as a form of control and ultimately comes out on top because of it. The challenge, like with every character, comes with being able to convey that to the audience. The blessing and curse with Dussie Mae is she is the character with the least backstory and history, but that gives me the ability to get creative and make Dussie Mae my own, which I am so excited to do!

**What would you like metro area audiences to know about the TRT production of Ma Rainey's Black Bottom?**

This production has heart and soul. Being around people who knew August Wilson personally is truly a blessing. The many stories that we hear about him allow us to feel his spirit in the rehearsal room and it brings a sense of fulfillment to the production. It is our job as actors to tell the story of our people and that is just what we are doing here.

**Tell us about your future plans.**

Before coming to Red Bank, I just finished up my first feature film produced by Forest Whitaker and Pharell Williams called *ROXANNE, ROXANNE*. It details the early life of the 80s female rap legend Roxanne Shante, who I play. I am anxiously waiting for the release of that and looking forward to any other projects, be it TV, film, or theatre, that come my way!

Ticket prices range from \$40 to \$70, with discounts available for groups, seniors, and U.S. military personnel, their families, and veterans. A limited number of \$20 tickets are available for every performance; \$20 tickets may be partial view. Tickets for patrons under 30 are \$20 and include the best available seats at every performance.

Performances will begin in Two River's Rechnitz Theater, 21 Bridge Avenue, on Saturday, September 10 and continue through Sunday, October 9. Ticket prices range from \$40 to \$70, with discounts available for groups, seniors, and U.S. military personnel, their families, and veterans. A limited number of \$20 tickets are available for every performance; \$20 tickets may be partial view. Tickets for patrons under 30 are \$20 and include the best available seats at every performance. Tickets are available by calling 732.345.1400 or visit the Two River web site at [www.tworivertheater.org](http://www.tworivertheater.org). The lead production sponsor is Riverview Medical Center and the media partner is WBGO Jazz 88.3 FM.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Chante Adams