

Port City Playhouse Produces Fences
Ed Bishop directs all African-American cast.

[Gale Curcio](#)

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Port City Playhouse is known for having firsts. Its upcoming production of "Fences" is no exception. It's the first August Wilson play being performed there; it's the first all African American cast; it's the first time that Ed Bishop is directing at Port City; and the first time most of the actors in the cast are appearing at Port City. Bishop, who has been involved in professional and community theater for 30 years, said that he still finds time to volunteer in the theater. Bishop is both a director and performer. He has many directing credits, both in the Washington, D.C. area and nationally. He is an active Screen Actors' Guild member, with film, Broadway, Off and Off-off Broadway performance experience.

When he saw that Port City was looking for a director for this show, he was very interested.

"It's important to be able to give. August Wilson is one of the shows I always wanted to do," Bishop said. "This is one of his best pieces."

Wilson's playwriting awards include two Pulitzer Prizes, two Tony Awards and several Drama Critics Circle Awards. "Fences" has won all three of these major prizes as well as many other honors.

Critics say that Wilson has a well-developed sense of history and a keen insight into the black experience in the 20th century. His goal is to write a play for each decade of the century, revealing the effect of the times on the lives of African-Americans.

"Fences" is one of eight plays Wilson has written so far that are set in different decades. This one begins in the '50s and features Troy Maxson, a 53-year-old garbage collector in a northern industrial city with a wife and two sons. He is a storyteller and a dreamer, a big man with impressive strengths and glaring weaknesses. Despite his youthful prowess as a star baseball player, no path to a professional career was then open to him. His early experience has embittered him and now he questions and obstructs his youngest son's athletic ambitions.

BISHOP HAS BROUGHT with him not only his directing expertise, but some new faces as well. For this production of "Fences," he has assembled a cast with Michael Sainte-Andress as Troy; Patricia Williams as Rose; Paul Andrew Morton as Bono; DeLon Howell as Cory; Rashard Harrison as Gabriel; and Rick Peete as Lyons. The two youngest cast members — Naila Newsome and Gabrielle Powell — will play the seven-year-old Raynell, in alternate performances.

Where & When

Performances for "Fences" by August Wilson are: April 8, 9, 15, 16, 19, 22 and 23. All shows start at 8 p.m. and are at The Lee Center, 1108 Jefferson St., Alexandria. Tickets are: \$12, seniors/students \$10. Call 703-838-2880 for reservations or visit the Web site: www.portcityplayhouse.com for information, directions and on-line ticket purchase.



“This is a good cast,” Bishop said. “Wherever I work, actors follow me.”

All the actors seem to be having a good time with the show. Paul Andrew Morton, who plays “Bono,” said, “I fell in love with it [the script]. Now I have a chance to see it come to life.” Playing Rose is Patricia Williams. Although she has worked a lot in film, she said, “I’m a little nervous. There’s so much to Rose.”

Rashard Harrison (Gabriel) said, “I’m a musician and a writer, but I like doing the [acting] work — getting the vision. This is a rich story, very deep, and I like working with the cast.” “I like the play,” said Rick Peete (Lyons). “It’s a good story about real people and real life.” Michael Sainte-Andress (Troy) said that he has worked with Bishop before and that he works very well under him.

“He respects us and we appreciate what he can do to help us as an actor,” Sainte-Andress said. Playing the part of Troy, Sainte-Andress has 70 percent of the dialogues in the show, but said, “I always want these challenges. It’s exhilarating and exciting and I’m curious to see what the result is.”

“I like the play and like the family dynamic,” said DeLon Howell (Cory).

Serving in a support role is Bob Walsh, who started handling the publicity for Port City about three years ago when he retired. “I always liked theater,” he said. Walsh gets the word out about auditions and helps with the sets when needed.