

NOW ON STAGE

Amy Marshall
Managing Director

Jim Petosa
Artistic Director

Brad Watkins
Producing Director

present

Big River

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
written by William Hauptman
music and lyrics by Roger Miller
adapted from the novel by Mark Twain

featuring

Priscilla Cuellar	Elizabeth Fette	David Frankenberger, Jr.
Rebecca A. Herron	Isaiah Johnson*	Nicolas Lehan
Melvin B. Logan	Deborah Lubega	Sam Ludwig
Daniel Townsend	Gregory Joseph Twomey	Vishal Vaidya
Dan Van Why	Jade Wheeler	

Choreographer

Boo Killebrew

Musical Director

Aaron Broderick

Scenic Designer

Jeremy W. Foil

Costume Designer

Pei Lee

Lighting Designer

Mark Lanks

Sound Designer

Jarett C. Pisani

Stage Manager

Jocelyn Henjum

Production Manager

Ryan N. Knapp

Company Manager

Sean Cox

Technical Director

Daniel P. Parker

Costume Shop Manager

Jeanne Bland

Director

Eve Muson

*Mr. Johnson appears through the courtesy of Actors' Equity Association, The Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers of the United States. *Big River* is presented through special arrangement with R&H Theatricals, 1065 Avenue of The Americas, Suite 2400, New York, NY 10018. www.rhtheatricals.com.

THE CAST SCENES FROM THE DIRECTOR

In the creative environment of Olney Theatre Center, artists and audiences are encouraged to look for connections between the many plays produced each season. Just a few weeks ago, Olney Theatre Center presented the musical *1776*, which is about our Founding Fathers' struggle to write and ratify the Declaration of Independence. The play comes to a climax over the issue of slavery: the Northern colonies wish to abolish slavery within the Declaration itself—but the Southern colonies refuse to sign if the topic is so directly addressed. In the end, the Northern delegates agree to strike the abolition clause in order to pass a unanimous vote for independence. So, although the nation was founded on the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all individuals, its economic health was dependent upon the legal and systemic dehumanization of millions of African Americans.

In 1876, a hundred years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Mark Twain began writing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, partly inspired by his impressions of the nation's centennial anniversary celebrations and his ironic observations of the hypocrisy embedded at its core. The unresolved questions about slavery left to subsequent generations by the Founding Fathers ultimately led to the Civil War and the emancipation of the slaves. And yet even as early as 1876, the program of Reconstruction had all but dissolved with the passing of states' "Jim Crow" laws. In many cases, a southern African American's experience was little better than before emancipation.

Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in 1835, Mark Twain personified the contradictions contained within the national character. Raised in the slave-owning culture of Hannibal, Missouri (and even for a brief time half-heartedly serving in the Confederate Army), he spent his mature years in the north and became an ardent and vocal abolitionist. He at first intended *Huckleberry Finn* to be merely a sequel—another boy's adventure story—to the very popular *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. But Twain soon discovered that through Huck's innocent first-person voice, he could describe and expose the important historical and social contradictions of a nation permitting the practices of racism and segregation while being simultaneously committed to principles of equality and freedom. As novelist Ralph Ellison observed, it is this irony at the core of the American experience that Mark Twain forces us to confront head-on. The recognition of these social incongruities in the late nineteenth century, and indeed in the new millennium, continue to make *Huckleberry Finn* a novel worthy of discussion.

Twain's masterpiece continues to stimulate and provoke because of its original narrative voice; its realistic subject matter; and its depiction of moral integrity, loyalty, and sacrifice. As Huck and Jim navigate the Mississippi and negotiate the corrupt (and often comic) society they encounter along its banks, *Big River* explores friendship, loyalty, morality, freedom, race, and America itself. With a "sound heart" triumphing over a "deformed conscience," Huck decides he'd rather "go to hell" rather than give his friend Jim up to slavery. While focusing on the Huck's energetic innocence, Jim's generous wisdom, and the comedy and humanity of folks they meet, *Big River* nevertheless captures Twain's ironic sense of humor and keen observation. Though Huck and Jim cannot fully overcome the social obstacles that are placed before them, the fact that they establish a bond that challenges the boundaries set up by society, even if for a brief, fleeting moment, is testament to the heroic potential of our national character.

-Eve Muson, Director

301.924.3400

National Players'
BIG RIVER
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

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