The Call Is Places
2018–2019 SUBSCRIBER NEWSLETTER

WORLD PREMIERE

Floyd’s
July 27 – Aug 31
McGuire Proscenium Stage
WELCOME

From Artistic Director
Joseph Haj

Dear Friends,

If you’ve had the privilege of experiencing Lynn Nottage’s work, it’s easy to understand why she has won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice (and is the only woman to have done so). She’s a luminary among us, shining a light on social, political and economic issues and giving a voice to marginalized individuals with humor and empathy. Much like Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Lorraine Hansberry and other distinguished playwrights who have gone before her, I believe Nottage is writing brilliant plays for today that will be considered classics tomorrow — and Floyd’s is no exception.

The Guthrie has been a long-standing enthusiast of Nottage’s work, from our 2005 production of Intimate Apparel to the commission issued under Joe Dowling’s artistic leadership that led to the creation of Floyd’s. Set in the kitchen of a sandwich shop and inspired by hundreds of interviews Nottage conducted in America’s Rust Belt, Floyd’s, in the context of a comedy, insightfully interrogates the realities of those returning from prison and the challenges they face as they reenter society.

Floyd’s has also brought about an exciting community partnership with All Square — a grilled cheese restaurant and professional institute in Minneapolis on the same mission as the play’s Zen Master Montrellous: to ensure citizens returning after incarceration have bright, productive futures. For the line cooks in Floyd’s, crafting a delicious sandwich isn’t just a skill — it’s a lifeline, as this incredible cast and creative team illuminate onstage.

Director Kate Whoriskey, Nottage’s longtime collaborator, described hearing Lynn’s words before anyone else as a “wonderful treasure.” As we bring our 2018–2019 Season to a close, I’m thrilled to share that gift with you through the world premiere of Floyd’s here at the Guthrie.

Thank you for joining us,

From Artistic Director
Joseph Haj

Floyd’s
July 27 – Aug 31, 2019
McGuire Proscenium Stage

Visit guthrietheater.org for additional productions and play descriptions.

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PHOTO: KERI PICKETT
Floyd’s
by Lynn Nottage

Creative Team

DIRECTOR Kate Whoriskey
SCENIC DESIGNER Laura Jellinek
COSTUME DESIGNER Jennifer Moeller
LIGHTING DESIGNER Christopher Akerlind
SOUND DESIGNER Justin Ellington
ORIGINAL MUSIC Justin Hicks
DEVELOPMENTAL DRAMATURG Jo Holcomb
PRODUCTION DRAMATURG Morgan Holmes
RESIDENT VOICE COACH Jill Walmsley Zager
FIGHT DIRECTOR Aaron Preusse
MOVEMENT DIRECTOR Leah Nelson
STAGE MANAGER Tree O’Halloran*
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER Katie Hawkkinson*
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Signe Harriday
NYC CASTING CONSULTANT McCorkle Casting, Ltd.
DESIGN ASSISTANTS Polly Bilski (costumes)
Ryan Connealy (lighting)
Katharine Horowitz (sound)

*Member of Actors’ Equity Association
Truckers drive miles out of their way to stop at Floyd’s — a sandwich shop in Pennsylvania run by the eponymous, tough-as-nails Floyd. Her business plan? To only hire folks desperate for work after returning from incarceration. While her sometimes criminal and always devilish savvy keeps the pantry stocked and the plates of food expedited, it’s the five-star artistry from head chef and sensei Montrellous that draws in customers. Line cooks Letitia and Rafael, both hungry for a path forward in life, envision the gourmet ingredients of their perfect sandwich while slinging cheesy bacon fries. That is until Jason, a new line cook with oppressive tattoos, brings the Zen kitchen flow to a sudden halt. Guided by Montrellous, the three sous chefs-in-training must work together to seek enlightenment and transcend Floyd — or else roast in truck-stop purgatory.

“Ain’t nobody gonna hire you except for Floyd. ’Cuz if you here, you done something. We all done something. And we just biding our time ’til we can get to another place.”

- Letitia to Jason in Floyd’s

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THE CREATIVE TEAM

Playwright Lynn Nottage

Lynn Nottage is the first woman in history to win two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama (Ruined in 2009 and Sweat in 2017, which moved to Broadway after a sold-out run at The Public Theater). Recently named one of Time’s 100 most influential people, Nottage brings her work to the Guthrie stage for the second time, her first being Intimate Apparel in the fall of 2005. Other plays include By the Way, Meet Vera Stark (Lilly Award, Drama Desk Award nomination); Ruined (Pulitzer Prize, Obie Award); Intimate Apparel (American Theatre Critics Association and New York Drama Critics’ Circle Awards for Best Play); Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine (Obie Award); Crumbs From the Table of Joy; Las Meninas; Mud, River, Stone; Por’knockers; and POOF!

Nottage recently wrote the book for the musical adaptation of Sue Monk Kidd’s novel The Secret Life of Bees, with music by Duncan Sheik and lyrics by Susan Birkenhead. The world premiere, directed by Sam Gold, played at the Atlantic Theater Company from May 12 to July 21, 2019.

In addition, Nottage is working with composer Ricky Ian Gordon to adapt her play Intimate Apparel into an opera. She has also developed This Is Reading, a performance installation at the Reading Railroad station in Reading, Pennsylvania. She is a writer and producer on the Netflix series “She’s Gotta Have It” directed by Spike Lee, a Dramatists Guild member and an associate professor at Columbia University School of the Arts. Awards include the MacArthur Genius Grant Fellowship, Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award and PEN/Laura Pels Master American Dramatist Award, among others.

“Each character is trying to negotiate their freedom and fully inhabit a body that was held captive physically and emotionally. They’re learning how to lean into forgiveness and understand that they have the power to transcend their mistakes.”

– Lynn Nottage on Floyd’s

Director Kate Whoriskey

Kate Whoriskey has directed on Broadway, off-Broadway and regionally. Her directing credits for productions on Broadway include Sweat at Studio 54 and The Miracle Worker at Circle in the Square Theatre. Selected off-Broadway credits include Songs for a New World at Encores! Off-Center, Sweat at The Public Theater, How I Learned to Drive at Second Stage Theatre, Ruined at Manhattan Theatre Club, Her Requiem at Lincoln Center Theater, Aubergine; Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine; and Inked Baby at Playwrights Horizons and The Piano Teacher at Vineyard Theatre.

Whoriskey’s regional credits include the Goodman Theatre, Geffen Playhouse, South Coast Repertory, Sundance Institute Theatre Lab, Shakespeare Theatre Company, American Repertory Theater, Huntington Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Baltimore Center Stage and Arena Stage, among others.

“Many projects begin with Lynn calling me and then, suddenly, we’re going somewhere. Whether it’s Reading, Pennsylvania, or Uganda or a theater in Minneapolis, a spirit of adventure and curiosity has given us common experiences from which to draw.”

– Kate Whoriskey on her longtime collaboration with Lynn Nottage

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– Lynn Nottage on Floyd’s

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A Conversation With Lynn Nottage

It’s hard to talk about American theater and not mention Lynn Nottage. She’s a powerhouse playwright known for propelling the art form forward through unsung voices and untold stories. Many call her prolific, but that seems too small a word for a woman who has won two Pulitzers and was named one of TIME’s most influential people of 2019. We asked her to share — in her own words — about playwriting, developing Floyd’s and dreaming up all those sandwiches.

What advice did you find most helpful as a young playwright? Playwright August Wilson once told me, “A writer writes.” As a young writer, I was confused by that simple statement. But I now understand that he was wisely encouraging me to write every single day regardless of the outcome. Today, I tell young writers that succeeding in playwriting is a battle of attrition. The work doesn’t happen overnight and you have to spend time honing your craft. We live in an impatient culture that wants instant results. Too often, young writers abandon their voice before they’ve had time to develop it.

Who helped you stay the course and develop your voice? There were two instrumental people who shaped me as a playwright. The first was my professor George Bass at Brown University. He was a playwright, director and founder of Rites and Reason Theatre, which celebrated the voices of African American theater artists. He taught me the essential ingredients of making theater — joy and ritual.

The second was Paula Vogel, who was also my professor and the first female playwright I ever met. Prior to her class, most of the plays I read in school were written by white men. I had to go well outside the academy to find plays written by women and people of color. So meeting Paula was a breath of fresh air. She was the one who encouraged me to consider being a playwright. Up until then, I thought it was a hobby and not a possibility for someone who looked like me.

When a play idea sparks, which comes first: people, plot or platform? It depends. Sweat began with a commission from Oregon Shakespeare Festival to write a play that engaged with American history — specifically a revolution. I didn’t know where to start, so I found my way through immersive research. I wrote By the Way, Meet Vera Stark, a play about an African American starlet in the 1930s, after watching a film series on Turner Classic Movies. I became acutely aware of the absence of strong, black females in film during that period, and I wondered about the fate of talented black actresses who dared to challenge the status quo.

What was the spark that became Floyd’s? Floyd’s began as a conversation with Sweat, which takes place in Reading, Pennsylvania, where I spent a great deal of time interviewing residents. I wanted to write about the deindustrialization happening there, but I also wanted to write something fun, accessible and irreverent — hence Floyd’s.

Is it challenging to write multiple plays at once? When I’m writing a play with weighty themes, I often have...
another play going — my side hustle — that becomes my escape. The plays are in conversation, but they demand opposite parts of my brain. With Sweat, I wanted to dialogue on an immediate, political and visceral level. With Floyd’s, I wanted to dialogue on a spiritual and emotional level. My research involved eating delicious food and chatting with a friend who owned an artisanal sandwich shop. I tasted things I love and came up with flavor combinations that felt delightful and unexpected. My favorite part of writing Floyd’s was imagining the sandwiches.

Tell us about the development process that led to Floyd’s. Floyd’s was a commission from the Guthrie, so I was fortunate to hold developmental workshops here that helped me find the characters’ voices and dig into the play in a more expansive way. Writing at my computer is a solitary act where I spend time fully visualizing and exploring the play. But one of the best things about writing a play is the moment when you place the work into the hands of a director, actors and designers. They breathe fresh and different life into the piece, and I’m always delighted and surprised by what they discover.

You and director Kate Whoriskey are longtime collaborators. What have you discovered together? The first time Kate and I worked together was on my play Intimate Apparel. We instantly found that we shared a vocabulary and had fun making theater together. I feel incredibly blessed to have found an amazing collaborator I can depend on and who responds to my work. We’ve grown and evolved together. Floyd’s is our fifth collaboration, and working at the Guthrie with Kate is really quite special.

Tell us more about your research in Reading. Why did this community captivate you?

On my first visit, I assumed I would do a quick series of interviews and I’d develop a play. But I found that Reading demanded more attention. There was an air of despair, frustration and an overall sense of abandonment permeating the city, and I felt I couldn’t walk away. I was drawn to the honesty and spirit of the people and became invested in understanding their circumstances and how the economic downturn led to the city’s decline. It echoed what was happening throughout the country, and I wanted to fully understand the how and the why. What began as a simple trip became more than two years of immersion, and that engagement led to the writing of Sweat.

Yet my conversations with the people of Reading didn’t feel complete. So I created a massive performance installation with Kate Whoriskey and Tony Gerber called This Is Reading, which was based on our interviews and designed to help heal and engage the community through constructive and collective dialogue.

Floyd’s is the grace note in the Reading trilogy. It’s about formerly incarcerated people who have been marginalized and are unsure if they can reintegrate into society. They struggle until they realize they have all the tools necessary to rebuild their lives. I also think that’s true of Reading.

You often write about marginalized characters. Why is that important to you? I’m an African American woman who is interested in writing plays through my own unique gaze. As someone who has had to embrace my outsider status, the characters I’m drawn to are the ones I understand.

PHOTO: DAN NORMAN
Every character in Floyd’s has been impacted by the criminal justice system. Why this deliberate choice?
I was interested in people who find themselves in limbo and attempt to emerge from a place of darkness without knowing how to fully embrace the light. The equivalent of that in our society are formerly incarcerated individuals who must reengage with a culture that doesn’t necessarily welcome them home with open arms. In that sense, the sandwich shop in Floyd’s is purgatory. Each character is trying to negotiate their freedom and fully inhabit a body that was held captive physically and emotionally. They’re learning how to lean into forgiveness and understand that they have the power to transcend their mistakes.

Mindfulness also seems to be a key theme in Floyd’s.
I often get anxious about the expectations for a commission. It’s not rational, but it’s real. While writing Floyd’s, mindfulness helped me manage my own anxiety. Instead of thinking about where and how I wanted the play to exist, I thought about the process of writing and focused on the joy of exploring the characters. I think that’s why Floyd’s became a play about mindfulness. Making a sandwich can be an exercise in mindfulness — particularly if you create it with intention, have a keen awareness of the elements and find joy in infusing it with a sense of self.

Besides being hungry, how do you hope audiences will feel after seeing Floyd’s?
Eating is a deeply spiritual experience, so I hope they’ll want to eat and be much more mindful about what they consume. In the play, Montrellous explains that the bread he’s holding comes from a seed of wheat cultivated a thousand years ago. We don’t think enough about the origins of our food and how many people touch it before it reaches us. I hope people will think about the journey a sandwich takes from the field to the market to the restaurant to the unseen, under-recognized community of people who prepare it.

Which playwright would you like to share a sandwich with?
Lillian Hellman. She’s an astonishing woman who wrote plays like Watch on the Rhine during a time when women didn’t have much access to the American stage. Yet she wrote with tenacity and bravery. I’d love to break bread with her, hear about her experience and learn how she kept her fire burning. I’d also love to break bread with Lorraine Hansberry, who wrote A Raisin in the Sun, which is, in my opinion, one of the few absolutely perfect plays. I would love to bask in her glow and have the pleasure of sharing a good meal with a brilliant playwright and activist.

Is playwriting a form of activism for you?
My parents were ordinary folks with activist impulses. I think that spirit of activism is deeply embedded in my work. It stems from my parents’ passion and my own experience working in human rights for several years. It’s in the DNA of who I am as a writer.

Inquiring minds want to know: What’s your favorite sandwich?
I love a good tuna sandwich with habaneros, red onions and chopped pickles.

Don’t miss Sweat on the Guthrie stage next summer.

Gifts in good taste.
What’s playing onstage always inspires what’s in store. In honor of Floyd’s, we’ve added Lynn Nottage scripts, reusable sandwich bags, specialty cookbooks and more to our rotating collection of show-themed keepsakes.

Visit us on Level One or shop online at guthriestore.com.
The Road to Floyd’s

By Morgan Holmes
Production Dramaturg

2008: Oregon Shakespeare Festival commissions Lynn Nottage through their American Revolutions: The United States History Cycle program.

September 2011: Nottage reads a report in *The New York Times* on the 2010 U.S. Census, which reveals that Reading, Pennsylvania, has the most residents living in poverty for a population over 65,000. The 41.3% poverty rate is due to the loss of major manufacturing plants and other jobs, low education rates and economic changes.

October 2011: Nottage receives an email from a friend in dire financial straits. Together they participate in the Occupy Wall Street protests. Her interest in the “de-industrial revolution” and the impact of the 2008 financial crisis grows.

January 2012: Nottage takes her first trip to Reading and sees it as a microcosm of what is happening to small cities across the country. She and director Kate Whoriskey spend two years interviewing residents, which leads to the writing of *Sweat*.

January 2014: The Guthrie Theater receives a Joyce Award to support the commissioning of Nottage to write a companion piece to *Sweat*.

July 2015: *Sweat* opens at Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

November 2016: *Sweat* opens at The Public Theater in New York City. Nottage receives an Obie Award for Playwriting and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play.

December 2016: *Sweat* is performed in Reading.

March 2017: *Sweat* opens on Broadway and receives three Tony Award nominations.

April 2017: Nottage wins her second Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Sweat*, making her the first female playwright to win the award twice.

July 2017: Nottage and a team of artists produce *This Is Reading* — a performance installation in the abandoned Reading Railroad station. The project tells the story of the city’s past and points toward a hopeful future.

March 2018: The Guthrie announces *Floyd’s* (originally titled *Reading Play*) as part of its 2018–2019 Season.

October 2018: The Public Theater’s Mobile Unit National brings free performances of *Sweat* to 18 cities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Performances and community engagement programming in Mankato, Rochester and St. Cloud are produced in collaboration with the Guthrie.

August 2019: *Floyd’s* opens at the Guthrie.
How Floyd’s Stacks Up

What would a sandwich shop be without piles of ingredients? At every show, the cast turns Lynn Nottage’s fantasy recipes into reality by making (and eating) mouthwatering sandwiches onstage.

More than 80 ingredients to make

- 20 fruits and vegetables
- 30+ sandwiches
- 14 herbs and spices
- 12 kinds of bread
- 16 spreads and condiments
- 22 meats, cheeses and other proteins

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SAINT PAUL PUBLIC LIBRARY

Playwriting to Sandwich-Making
The literary gurus at SPPL have curated an all-new list of reads and resources that explore the art of writing, mindful eating, returning citizens and more — all inspired by the story and characters of Floyd’s.

EXPLORE RESOURCES

GUTHRIE THEATER

Don’t miss a moment of our 2019-2020 Season. Subscriptions are on sale now at guthrietheater.org.

NEXT ON THE WURTELE THRUST STAGE

A poetic memory play
The Glass Menagerie
Sept 14 – Oct 27
by TENNESSEE WILLIAMS
directed by JOSEPH HAJ

For more staff-recommended book lists on a variety of topics, visit www.sppl.org.