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**August Wilson Center for African American Culture presents
World Premiere of Samm-Art Williams' *Last of the Line***

Pittsburgh, PA – September 13, 2011 -- The world premiere of Tony Award-nominated playwright and actor Samm-Art Williams' *Last of the Line* opens at the August Wilson Center for African American Culture, 980 Liberty Avenue, downtown Pittsburgh, on Friday, Sept. 30, with performances on Oct. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9. Performances are at 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays and at 3 p.m. on Sundays.

Last of the Line bursts with drama, comedy, suspense, candor, laughter and regret, as the descendants of African-American slaveholders and their ancestors take center stage. Told in a stream of consciousness tenor, the play flashes back from 2005 to the years 1845–75 in a story that tests loyalties and histories, and forces the modern day characters to examine their own identities in relation to power, resources and “blood money.”

The cast includes Montae Russell, a native Pittsburgher who lives in Hollywood. Russell played Zadro in NBC's *ER* from 1995-2006. His movie credits include *Godzilla*, *The Players Club* and *Lily in Winter*. August Wilson Center Theatre Ensemble cast members include Kevin Brown, Bria Walker, Vanessa German and Jason Shavers along with local actors Brenda Marks, Myneesha Miller, Les Howard and Tracey Turner.

Mark Clayton Southers, the August Wilson Center's Artistic Director of Theatre Initiatives, will direct the production. Southers explained why he was interested in presenting this work. “I like to delve into subjects that are life-illuminating for our audiences. I believe in theatre's ability to move people. *Last in the Line* explores topics that people may not have considered or culturally were afraid to ask about,” he explained. Southers added, “Williams' work sprinkles in history and extolls strong family values – values that are eroding in today's society -- adding touches of humor that will bowl you over.”

Williams said he chose to premiere his new work in Pittsburgh based on the reputation of Southers, the caliber of local actors and the receptivity of audiences. “In order to be open to changes and feedback for a premiere, a playwright must have trust in those factors.” Williams also noted the honor it is premiering at the August Wilson Center.

Williams says *Last in the Line* is somewhat cathartic, inspired by his personal experiences of living in this country as a black American. The work reflects the varied background of his own family and drives home his belief that “whatever your family background is you shouldn't be ashamed of it.” He's found that “it's by trying to be something other than what we are that our lives go astray.”

Born in Philadelphia and raised in the farming community of Burgaw, North Carolina, Samm-Art Williams, a playwright and actor, journeyed far from home but remained inspired by the life and language of the rural south. As a member of the Negro Ensemble Company throughout the seventies, Williams participated both on and offstage as a playwright and actor, and appeared in the 1975 Broadway production of Leslie Lee's *The First Breeze of Summer* (which was also the first play of Signature's Negro Ensemble Company Season). Williams' play *Home* was first staged by the NEC at St. Mark's Playhouse in 1979, and transferred to Broadway's Cort Theatre in 1980, where it earned nominations for the Tony and Drama Desk Awards. He is currently an Artist-in-Residence at North Carolina Central University.

Williams' other works with the Negro Ensemble Company include *Welcome to Black River* (1975), *A Love Play* (1976), *The Sixteenth Round* (1980), *Eyes of an American* (1985), and *The Waiting Room* (2007).

Williams is well known for his television work. He was co-executive producer of the CBS sitcom "Frank's Place," the NBC sitcom "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" and the ABC sitcom "Hangin' with Mr. Cooper," and executive producer of the FOX sitcom "Martin."

Tickets for *Last in the Line* are \$30, \$25 and \$20. Call 412.456.6666 or visit the Box Office at Theater Square or buy on-line at CulturalDistrict.org. For group discounts, call 412.471.6930. Tickets also are available at the August Wilson Center Box Office, 980 Liberty Avenue, downtown Pittsburgh, or by calling 412.338.8742.

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MEDIA: Please contact Diane Wuycheck, media relations consultant, at 412.471.4495 or wuycheck@wuycheck.com for any image or interview requests.

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ABOUT AUGUST WILSON CENTER FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE

Named for Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award-winning playwright and Hill District native August Wilson, the August Wilson Center for African American Culture engages regional and national audiences in its mission of preserving, presenting, interpreting, celebrating and shaping the art, culture and history of African Americans in Western Pennsylvania and people of African descent throughout the world.

Located in Downtown Pittsburgh's Cultural District, the multidisciplinary August Wilson Center is reflective of all aspects of African American culture. The Center's striking, two-story, green building houses a 486-seat theater for performances in all disciplines, exhibition galleries, multipurpose spaces for community programs and events and a gift shop. The Center is among a select few African American cultural institutions presenting visual and performing arts, the humanities and educational programs in a state-of-the-art venue.

More information is available on The Center's website at AugustWilsonCenter.org and by calling 412.258.2700.

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