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ALERT: SOUTHERN REP PARTNERS WITH JUNEBUG PRODUCTIONS, ASHÉ CULTURAL ARTS CENTER, AND TULANE UNIVERSITY FOR THE REGIONAL PREMIERE OF AMERIVILLE

New Orleans — Southern Rep, Junebug Productions, Ashé Cultural Arts Center, and Tulane University Department of Theatre and Dance announce their partnership to present the Regional Premiere of *Universes*, the Bronx-based ensemble group, and their production of *AMERIVILLE*. This historic and unprecedented collaboration will kick off with a celebratory **Change the World Cocktail Party on Monday evening, 6-8pm, October 26, 2009**; hosted by Ashé Cultural Arts Center. The partners are inviting members of the press to join artists and community leaders to enjoy cocktails and jambalaya, a sneak preview of *AMERIVILLE*, and a special appearance by legendary poet, rapper, songwriter and photographer, Saggi Khali.

Southern Rep and its partners will collaborate in the months leading up to the premiere of *AMERIVILLE* by sharing resources and space, planning master classes and community workshops, and encouraging discussion of the important social and artistic issues reflected in *AMERIVILLE*. All long-time members of the New Orleans arts community, the partners hope to strengthen the diverse communities in which they are based while creating opportunities for cross-cultural exchange amongst students, audience members, stakeholders and artists.

Universes, Steven Sapp, Mildred Ruiz, Gamal Abdel Chasten and Ninja, have created their own brand of high-energy performance, rooted in hip-hop but drawing on a global multitude of lyrical and musical influences and performance styles. **AMERIVILLE** gives new insight and urgency to our national re-examination of what it means to be American - with heart, impassioned stomps, and incandescent harmonies. It's a jubilant cry to rebuild America itself.

This expansive partnership project brings together an exceptionally diverse group of stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, members of the media, church and business leaders, as well as organizations' board members to ensure the widest possible impact of *Universes'* work in New Orleans. In addition to presenting *AMERIVILLE* on Southern Rep's mainstage, *Universes* will also present special matinee performances for local school children, teach master classes to local college students through Tulane University, and hold community-based workshops for the New Orleans arts community hosted by Ashé Cultural Arts Center. Junebug Productions and Ashé Cultural Arts Center will both contribute to the study guides prepared for the student matinee performances to ensure that they are culturally relevant, especially to local students of color.



Southern Rep **Artistic Director Aimée Hayes** was drawn to this wide-reaching partnership out of a shared belief in the power of Universes' production. "When I saw AMERIVILLE at this year's Humana Festival, I jumped to my feet along with the rest of the audience to applaud before the lights came down at the end of the show. After seeing a production that spoke to my hometown in such a ground-breaking and inspirational way, I knew we had to find a way to bring it here to share with our friends and neighbors." Thanks to the support of the National Endowment for the Arts, Louisiana Division of the Arts, Arts Council of New Orleans, New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, and the National Performance Network, Southern Rep sees AMERIVILLE and Universes' residency as fruitful and productive endeavor to benefit the New Orleans community at large.

Junebug Productions (JPI,) a professional African American arts organization located in New Orleans, Louisiana, produces, tours and presents high quality theater, dance and music that encourages and supports African Americans in the Black Belt South who are working to improve the quality of life available to themselves and others who are similarly oppressed and exploited. For the past 29 years, the company has toured the U.S. and performed internationally with **John O'Neal, Junebug's Artistic Director** who co-founded the Free Southern Theater in 1963 as a cultural arm of the southern Civil Rights Movement. Junebug Productions is currently creating the Free Southern Theater Institute (FSTI) to codify the particular techniques, ethics, and aesthetics developed by FST and Junebug Productions. Artists from around the region and the nation will be able to come to New Orleans, learn the FST and JPI technique and work with the local community and artists. Junebug is currently offering the third of three pilot program courses, "From Community to Stage," bringing in artists to work with community residents, high school and university students.

Ashé Cultural Arts Center is an effort to combine the intentions of neighborhood and economic development with the creative forces of community, culture and art to revive and reclaim a historically significant corridor in Central City New Orleans: Oretha Castle-Haley Boulevard, formerly known as Dryades Street. Ashé is a gathering place for emerging and established artists to present, create and collaborate in giving life to their art so as to activate the artistic, creative and entrepreneurial possibilities available in our community. Storytelling, poetry, music, dance, photography, and visual art all are a part of Ashé's work to revive the possibility and vision of a true "Renaissance on the Boulevard."

The Tulane Department of Theatre and Dance is a multi-disciplinary program that offers a fusion of performance styles and techniques in the framework of a liberal arts setting. Their diverse and international faculty teaches a mix of approaches that allow their students to explore all aspects of the theatrical and dance arts in order to help them prepare for the world around them. After beginning with the solid foundation of a hands-on curriculum, students are allowed to individualize their journey by choosing study in numerous



areas that include academic research, storytelling, regional and international dance styles, acting methodology, community action, directing, choreography, design and technical stagecraft. The Department's goal is to create the beginnings of a well-rounded dance or theatrical artist who understands where she or he fits into a larger performance community.

Founded in 1986, Southern Rep's mission is to develop and produce new plays, to provide our audience with professional theatre of the highest artistic quality and achievement, and to establish a creative working environment that nurtures theatre professionals. We strive to use the artistry of theatre to enlighten, educate, and entertain audiences in the metropolitan New Orleans area and South Gulf Coast region, and aim to extend that service through educational and outreach programs.

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