



AIMÉE HAYES, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR MARIEKE GABOURY, MANAGING DIRECTOR

THEATRE NEWS \*\*\* FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PRESS CONTACT: Sarah Zoghbi, szoghbi@southernrep.com

December 6, 2011

**SOUTHERN REP ANNOUNCES THE 2011-2012 WINNER & FINALISTS OF  
THE RUBY PRIZE  
A NATIONAL NEW PLAY AWARD FOR WOMEN OF COLOR PLAYWRIGHTS**

*New Orleans* – **Southern Rep** is thrilled to announce the winner and finalists of the 2011-2012 RUBY PRIZE!

*We feel it's important to recognize the enduring struggle of female playwrights of color. The award, with its \$10,000 prize and subsequent workshops, will highlight the best playwrights in the field. And our partnership with Hedgebrook will also deepen and expand our Ruby Prize winner's ability to work creatively, and most importantly, stress-free in the beautiful environment of Whidbey Island!* - Artistic Director, Aimée Hayes

**The 2011-2012 Ruby Prize Award Winning Play**

MERIT by Lenelle Moïse

**Two Finalists**

YOU FOR ME FOR YOU by Mia Chung

TAKARAZUKA!!! by Susan Soon He Stanton

In addition to an award of \$10,000, The Ruby Prize winner receives:

- An original, one of a kind Ruby Prize Award, designed for Southern Rep by Tom Mathis and made possible through generous donation by New Orleans' own Symmetry Jewelers
- A development workshop with collaboration of full artistic team at the Southern Rep New Play Bacchanal, held in New Orleans, January 4 – 7.
- A reading held in New York City, to continue development of the play and introduce the new work to a larger audience.
- A Ten-Day writing residency at Hedgebrook, a retreat for visionary women writers that includes one's own handcrafted cottage in the woods and meals from the organic gardens.

The two finalists will also have their new works read at the Southern Rep New Play Bacchanal in January 2012.

This is the second year of the Ruby Prize, launched in 2010 and named in honor of civil rights advocate Ruby Bridges, representing perseverance in the face of formidable obstacles. As a first-grader at the William Frantz Elementary School in the fall of 1960, Ms Bridges became one of the first African Americans to attend an integrated public school in New Orleans.

*The arts have always had incredible power to transform public opinion on important social issues, such as the way Norman Rockwell's painting of me influenced how many felt about race relations. I am honored that this award, which will help provide access to talented women of color, will carry my name. We must remember that racism is a grown-up disease, and we must stop using children to spread it.* – Ruby Bridges

As theatre arts professionals struggle with an ongoing disparity when it comes to the number of annual productions of plays written by female playwrights, and the financial compensation they receive when compared to their male counterparts, this national playwriting contest has been conceived as part of ongoing efforts made by Southern Rep to develop new American plays, support a diverse community of artists, and incite a stimulating dialogue within our community. **The 2011-2012 Ruby Prize selection committee included Gamal Abdel Chasten, Lydia Fort, Liz Engelman, and Kwame Kwei-Armah.**

## Winner & Finalist Biographies

**Lenelle Moïse, MERIT (winner)** Lenelle Moïse is a poet, playwright and solo performance artist who creates jazz-infused, hip-hop bred, politicized texts about the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, memory and spirit. She received her MFA in Playwriting from Smith College in 2004. Her work has been featured in venues as diverse as the Louisiana Superdome and the United Nations, as well as at colleges, theatres and festivals across the USA and Canada. Moïse is the Fall 2011 Fellow at the Ellen Stone Belic Institute for the Study of Women & Gender in the Arts & Media. She was the Spring 2011 Mellon Artist in Residence in Performance Studies at Northwestern University, a 2010 Hedgebrook Women Playwrights Festival Fellow and the recipient of the 2009-2010 Astraea Lesbian Writers Fund Award in Poetry. She has written several plays including the critically-acclaimed EXPATRIATE (Off-Broadway at the Culture Project, 2008), MATERMORPHOSIS, PURPLE and the Drammy Award-winning CORNERED IN THE DARK. She has been commissioned by the Kitchen Theatre Company, the Drama Studio and Serious Play! Theatre Ensemble. Her widely produced solo performance WOMB-WORDS, THIRSTING will be featured in the forthcoming Northwestern University Press collection SOLO/BLACK/WOMAN. She is the recipient of the James Baldwin Memorial Award in Playwriting and a Black Women Playwrights Group Award. Moïse lives in Northampton, MA where she is the city's 2010-2012 Poet Laureate. <http://www.lenellemoise.com>

**Mia Chung, YOU FOR ME FOR YOU (finalist)** is a member of New Dramatists and the Ma-Yi Writers Lab. She is also a 2011-12 fellow of The Playwrights Realm, the 2012 RISCAs playwriting fellow, and a 2011 TCG Global Connections grantee. She was a member of the inaugural 2010-2011 Civilians' R&D Group in Brooklyn. Her play EXQUISITE CORPSE received Honorable Mention for the 2011 Jane Chambers Award. Her work has been developed by The Inkwell, the Icicle Creek Theatre Festival, the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Mu Performing Arts, and the Brandeis Theatre Company. She received a Creative Arts Council grant, a Sloan commission, and a residency at the Millay Colony. MFA, Brown. MPhil, University of Dublin-Trinity College. BA, Yale.

**Susan Soon He Stanton, TAKARAZUKA!!! (finalist)'s** plays been produced or developed at organizations including Clubbed Thumb/Playwright's Horizon's Super Lab, The Flea, Hedgebrook, Joe's Pub, Kennedy Center, Ontario's Kitchener Festival, Kumu Kahua, Honolulu Theater for Youth, InkWell, Leviathan Lab, London's Institute for Contemporary Art, MaYi, New Century Theater Company, Lark, New Sounds Theatre, New Century Theater Company, RoAn Productions, SoHo Rep, Second Generation, The Unicorn, and Yale School of Drama and Yale Cabaret. She has a feature-film development grant and best screenplay award from the Sloan Foundation. She is from Honolulu, Hawai'i and was Honolulu Theatre for Youth resident playwright for their 2010-11 season. She is a member of the SoHo Rep Writer-Director Lab 2010-2011, MaYi Playwrights Group, and the 2011 Van Lier Fellow at the Lark. Susan has a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts Dramatic Writing. In 2010, she graduated with an MFA from the Yale School of Drama, where she was awarded the Eugene O'Neil Memorial Scholarship and the Audrey Woods Scholarship.

## The Ruby Prize Selection Panel Biographies

**Gamal Abdel Chasten** Songwriter/Poet/Screenwriter. Founding member of UNIVERSES. His work has toured more than 25 U.S. cities, and 5 countries. Theatrical writing credits include THE LAST WORD; GOD TOOK AWAY HIS POEM; THE RIDE (Universes); SLANGUAGE (Universes); and AMERIVILLE (Universes). Directing credits: THE LAST WORD (Austin, TX); FULL CIRCLE'S INNERVIEWS (Dance Theater Workshop-NYC); and ARTICULATION (Boston, MA). Gamal is currently working on several projects for screen: *Red Moon*; *Joe Bloe*; and *North Borough*. Appeared on the cover of *American Theater Magazine* 2004 (w/ UNIVERSES); and the *Source Magazine* 2000 (w/ Universes). Affiliations: 2008 Jazz@Lincoln Center Rhythm Road Tour; Member NET (Network of Ensemble Theaters); New York Theatre Workshop Usual Suspect Publications: Writers Corp Teacher Anthology (City Lights Books 2009); UNIVERSES-THE BIG BANG (2009 release- TCG Books); SLANGUAGE in The Fire This Time (TCG).

**Liz Engelman** is a freelance dramaturg who is currently splitting her time between Whidbey Island, WA and Ely, MN, where is the Alumnae Relations Coordinator of Hedgebrook, a retreat for women writers, and is the founder and director of Tofte Lake Center at Norm's Fish Camp, a creative retreat in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota. Liz has served as the Resident Dramaturg at Mixed Blood Theatre, as the Literary Director of the McCarter Theatre, the Director of New Play Development at ACT Theatre in Seattle, Washington, Literary Manager/Dramaturg at Seattle's Intiman Theatre, and as Assistant Literary Manager at Actors Theatre of Louisville. She has worked on the development of new plays at The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, ASK Theatre Projects, New York Theatre Workshop, the O'Neill Playwrights Conference, South Coast Rep, Denver Center, and Florida Stage. She has directed new plays at The Illusion Theatre, Mixed Blood Theatre, The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis, and Carleton College. Liz has been a guest at Washington University in St. Louis, the University of Puget Sound, Cornish College of

the Arts, and has taught playwriting at Freehold Studio Theatre Lab and The Playwrights' Center. She studied dramaturgy and new play development at Brown and Columbia universities, where she received her BA and MFA in theatre and dramaturgy, respectively. Liz is the co-editor with Michael Bigelow Dixon of several collections of plays, and a new book on playwriting exercises, and of two volumes of monologues with Tori Haring-Smith. Liz has served as President and Board Chair of LMDA, Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. She serves on the Advisory Board of the National New Play Network and is a member of the New Project Group of ITI. She has written articles published in *Theatre Topics* and *Theatre Forum*.

**Lydia Fort** has directed and developed work at several theatres including The Public Theater, Ensemble Studio Theater, Ma-Yi, Classical Theatre of Harlem, Soho Think Tank and will be directing the world premiere of RIP.TIED at freeFall Theatre this spring. She is a New York Theatre Workshop Directing Fellow, Drama League Directing Fellow and a TCG New Generations Future Leaders Grantee. She received an MFA in Directing and a Certificate in Arts Management for the Performing Arts from the University of Washington. Ms. Fort is an Assistant Professor at The City College of New York where she teaches Directing, Suzuki Actor Training and Non-Western Drama.

**Kwame Kwei-Armah** is an award-winning British playwright, director, actor, and broadcaster. Kwei-Armah's plays include SEIZE THE DAY, A BITTER HERB, BLUES BROTHER SOUL SISTER, BIG NOSE, and his triptych of plays chronicling the struggles of the British African-Caribbean community in London—ELMINA'S KITCHEN, FIX UP, and STATEMENT OF REGRET—which each premiered at the National Theatre between 2003- 2007. With ELMINA'S KITCHEN he became the first Black Briton to have a play produced in London's West End; ELMINA'S KITCHEN and LET THERE BE LOVE each had their American debuts at CENTERSTAGE. He wrote the 2010 teleplay, WALTER'S WAR, about the first Black commissioned officer to lead British troops during WW I; has made numerous contributions to *The Guardian* and other leading papers in London; and has served as presenter in documentaries and culture programs. As an actor, Kwei-Armah appeared in the British TV medical drama "Casualty," followed by a recurring role on its sister series, "Holby City," as well as appearances on numerous other hit shows in Britain. He has been named a Writer-in-Residence at the Bristol Old Vic and for BBC Radio drama, an Associate Artist and board member at the National Theatre of Great Britain and London's Tricycle Theatre, as well as being named an Associate Artist at CENTERSTAGE, where he made his directing debut with Naomi Wallace's THINGS OF DRY HOURS. Since then he has directed the Pulitzer nominated playwright Eisa Davis's 10-minute play DAVE CHAPPELLE WAS RIGHT for the 24 HOUR PLAYS on Broadway, and two successful productions of his play LET THERE BE LOVE at the Tricycle Theatre London. Kwei-Armah has been named the Goodwill ambassador for Trade for Christian Aid; Chancellor of University of the Arts London; and served as Artistic Director for the World Arts Festival in Senegal, a month-long World Festival of Black Arts and Culture.

### **Hedgebrook & Southern Rep Biographies**

**Hedgebrook** is a literary non-profit that supports the work of visionary women writers whose stories shape our culture now and for generations to come. Founded in 1988, Hedgebrook hosts a global community of writers, more than 1,200 in two decades, at our Whidbey Island retreat. Hedgebrook's public programs connect these women's work with thousands of readers and audience members each year through readings, screenings, events, salons, publications and festivals. The annual Hedgebrook Women Playwrights Festival (HWPF) celebrates the work of women writing for the theatre. Since the festival's inauguration in 1998, HWPF has supported the work of an impressive array of women playwrights and served an important role in the development of new plays by women.

**Southern Rep** enters its 25th season as New Orleans' only year-round professional theatre, continuing to produce bold world and regional premieres under the leadership of Artistic Director, Aimée Hayes and Managing Director, Marieke Gaboury. In addition to Southern Rep's ongoing commitment to new play development with exciting programs like 6X6 NEW PLAY SLAM, PlayLab, and DEBAUCHERY, a host of evocative main stage shows are taking the stage for this important Southern Rep anniversary. The season began with the underlying animalisms of seemingly civilized parents in GOD OF CARNAGE, and continued with the trials of an ambitious artist in RED. Spring will bring a fresh production of the American and New Orleanian classic, A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE. We are also thrilled to welcome so many of our friends and neighbors to the Southern Rep this season in the return of the popular CITY SERIES, featuring productions from Ricky Graham, Running With Scissors, Theatre13 and the New Orleans Bingo! Show. Southern Rep offers educational programs such as free student matinees, \$10 student rush tickets and Academy SRT; as well as providing an artistic home to new works in development in the annual New Play Bacchanal.

*Southern Rep continues to show that it is staging the most important, challenging, and downright mesmerizing pieces of theater New Orleans audiences are graced to experience. - Theodore P. Mahne, The Times-Picayune Lagniappe*