



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SOUTHERN REP ANNOUNCES  
RAMP BY EISA DAVIS  
AS 2011 THE RUBY PRIZE WINNER;  
KATORI HALL AND KIMBER LEE FINALISTS**

**WITH FINALIST READINGS TO PERFORMED AT  
THE ANNUAL SOUTHERN REP NEW PLAY BACCHANAL  
FULL SCHEDULE INCLUDED BELOW!**

*New Orleans* – Southern Rep is thrilled to announce **RAMP** by Eisa Davis as winner of **The Ruby Prize**, a new play contest which awards \$10,000 to a woman of color playwright and future development workshops at Southern Rep, as well as in New York City. **The two finalists for The Ruby who will receive developmental readings at the New Play Bacchanal Festival include HURT VILLAGE by Katori Hall and FIGHT by Kimber Lee.** Additional finalists include **Tanya Saracho's MALA HIERBA** and **Jocelyn Bioh's AFRICAN AMERICANS.**

The Ruby Prize is 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. This past November marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her legendary walk up the school steps, memorialized in photos that depict a little girl surrounded by protesters, state officials, cameras and a sea of frightened faces. We were touched by the notion that there continue to be people, of all ages, braving a walk that is still harder than it should be.

*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.

*We feel it's important to recognize the enduring struggle of female playwrights of color. This prize will highlight the best playwrights in the field and introduce a new opportunity for them.*

– Artistic Director, Aimée Hayes

## THE NEW PLAY BACCHANAL SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

### January 20<sup>th</sup>

**6:00pm** - Special Guest Speaker (*to be announced*) – This event is FREE!

**8:00pm** - The 10 Minute Play Slam: See the best plays from our 10 Minute Play contest!

### January 21<sup>st</sup>

**5:30pm** - A reading of Ruby Prize Finalist FIGHT, by Kimber Lee

What does it take to be a fighter? Dani Perez is about to find out. On the run from the oppressive silence of her aunt's apartment, Dani starts training at the boxing gym where her estranged father once reigned supreme. Day after day she works to learn the sweet science of boxing, and finds true victory in the ring comes not only through strength and speed but also persistence, hard work, and having the heart to stand, face your own worst fears and never give up.

**8:00pm** - The 10 Minute Play Slam: See the best plays from our 10 Minute Play contest!

### January 22<sup>nd</sup>

**2:00pm** – A reading of Ruby Prize Finalist HURT VILLAGE, by Katori Hall

This two-act play concerns the residents of a Memphis housing project, principally three generations of women living under one roof who struggle with the effects of urban blight, drug addiction, and soldiers returning from war. At its heart it is an examination of a close-knit community, delighting in joy when they find it, and surviving tragedy when it befalls them. The keen eye with which Hall investigates this community is equaled by the lyricism with which she renders the struggles of ordinary people.

**5:00pm** - Women of Color in the American Theatre: Empowerment, Tradition and Trend:

A stirring discussion of how and where women of color playwrights find artistic resonance and support in the field; where racial and feminist history intersects, influences and shapes their voices; and what promise the future holds. Featuring guest speakers Carol Bebel, Valerie Curtis-Newton, Tarell Alvin McCraney, John O'Neal & Jim O'Quinn. – This event is FREE!

**8:00pm** - The 10 Minute Play Slam: See the best plays from our 10 Minute Play contest!

**10:30pm** - Late Night - AlternaEnding Play Slam: allows theatre makers an opportunity to submit and perform a twist ending to familiar works. Hilarious fun!

**11:30pm** - TOGA PARTY! (*Sheets will be available to the unadorned.*)

**Tickets for the New Play Bacchanal are just \$5, with FREE lectures on January 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>! To make reservations, go online to [www.SouthernRep.com](http://www.SouthernRep.com) or call our box office at (504) 522 – 6545. All events are held at the Southern Rep theatre at The Shops at Canal Place, 365 Canal Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor.**

**Read below for more information about the winning RUBY playwrights and Ruby Bridges.**

**Southern Rep** enters its 24th season as the region's premiere 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 an exciting Mainstage season that takes us on a journey from the dining room table to a 19<sup>th</sup> Century doctor's examining table to a magical realm inhabited by mythical creatures, Southern Rep at Le Chat Noir offers a second stage season of eclectic, smart, silly and audacious theatrical fare. Southern Rep continues to offer 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*

## Playwright Biographies

**RUBY PRIZE WINNER Eisa Davis** was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama for her play *BULRUSHER*, published by Samuel French. She wrote and starred in *ANGELA'S MIXTAPE*, named a Best of Off Broadway in 2009 by *The New Yorker*. In late 2009, *The Village Voice* recognized Eisa as a playwright who had made a significant contribution to the decade in theater. Other plays include *THE HISTORY OF LIGHT*, *PAPER ARMOR*, *UMKOVU*, *SIX MINUTES*, *WARRIORS DON'T CRY*, and *HIP HOP ANANSI*. She is a winner of the Helen Merrill Award, the Whitfield Cook Award, the Lippmann Family Award, the In The Spirit of America Award, and has received fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, Cave Canem, and the Van Lier and Mellon Foundations. Her work has been produced by New Georges, Urban Stages, Cornerstone, Mixed Blood, the Contemporary American Theater Festival, Shotgun Players, Synchronicity Performance Group, Imagination Stage, Pillsbury House, New Village Arts, Tennessee Women's Project, and the 24 Hour Plays on Broadway. Eisa's plays have been developed by the Public Theater, Hip Hop Theater Festival, New York Theater Workshop, New York Stage and Film, LAByrinth Theater Company, the New Group, Soho Rep, the Flea, Rattlestick, the Cherry Lane, the Kitchen, PS 122, Portland Center Stage, Hartford Stage, Cleveland Playhouse, the Geva, Seattle Rep, Yale University, Nuyorican Poets Café, the Schomburg Center for Black Research, and the Culture Project, among others. Eisa was a resident playwright at New Dramatists, a member of the Soho Rep Writer Director Lab, is a Usual Suspect at the New York Theatre Workshop, and is a member of PEN. Recent acting work includes the world premiere of *This* at Playwrights Horizons, and her Obie Award-winning performance in the Broadway rock musical *Passing Strange*, now a film directed by Spike Lee. Eisa is also featured in the films *Welcome to the Rileys* opposite James Gandolfini, *Robot Stories*, *The Architect*, *Confess*, *Happenstance*, *Pretty Bird*, *Apparition of the Eternal Church*, *Brass Tacks*, and is currently shooting *In The Family*. She was Bubbles' sister on *The Wire*, and has guest starred on *Damages* and *Mercy*. Eisa's album of original music, *Something Else*, is available through iTunes and CDBaby. She sings her original music at venues including Joe's Pub, BAMCafé, Symphony Space, and the Whitney Museum. An alumna of Harvard and the Actors Studio Drama School, Eisa lives in Brooklyn.

**RUBY PRIZE FINALIST Katori Hall** is a Memphis native and a graduate of Columbia University, the ART Advanced Theatre Training at Harvard University and the Lila Acheson Wallace playwriting program at the Julliard School. The 2007 Cherry Lane production of her play *HOODOO LOVE* established her as one of the most exciting and ambitious emerging playwrights. Katori won the 2010 Olivier Award for her play *THE MOUNTAINTOP*, making her only the fourth woman and the first black woman to win that award. *THE MOUNTAINTOP* is slated for production on Broadway this season under the direction of Kenny Leon. Among her many other awards are the Lark Theatre's Playwrights of New York Fellowship, the Van Lier Fellowship from the Public Theater, and the Lorraine Hansberry Writing Award.

**RUBY PRIZE FINALIST Kimber Lee** is completing her 3rd year in the University of Texas at Austin MFA Playwriting Program. Before returning to school, Kimber worked as a professional actor, theatre administrator, and director. Acting credits include work with A Contemporary Theatre, Seattle Repertory Theatre, California Shakespeare Festival, Intiman Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, and Indiana Repertory Theatre; and her plays have been produced in Seattle, NYC, Aspen, and San Diego. She served as Associate Director for Mo'olelo Performing Arts Company in San Diego, and recently returned from a summer working as the Literary Resident at Playwrights Horizons in NYC. Her play *TOPPER* was a winner of the 2009 Theatre Masters National MFA Playwriting Competition, and was selected for production in the 2010 Quickies Short Play Festival in Seattle. Her full length play *FIGHT* received the Holland New Voices Award as part of Mainstage selection to the Great Plains Theatre Conference in May 2010, and was a Semi-finalist for Seven Devils Playwrights Conference, a Finalist for the Bay Area Playwrights' Festival, and a Finalist for the 2010 O'Neill National Playwrights Conference.

## Ruby Bridges, A Child of Courage, a Woman of Determination

On November 14, 1960, surrounded by armed US marshals, six-year-old Ruby Bridges integrated William Frantz Elementary in New Orleans. Many already know Ruby and her story. Norman Rockwell's painting, "The Problem We All Live With" remains a quintessential image of the Civil Rights Movement. John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* also includes a description of Ruby walking past angry mobs to enter school. Robert Coles penned a 1995 book, *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, and soon after Walt Disney Home Entertainment produced a television movie based on her life. The movie received the honor of being screened in the White House, and on January 8, 2001 President Bill Clinton presented Ruby Bridges Hall with the Presidential Citizens Medal. In 1999, Ruby published her own award-winning memoir, *Through My Eyes*.



In addition, one of the world's largest children's museums, the Children's Museum of Indianapolis, has focused on the importance of Ruby Bridge's story and created a permanent exhibition entitled "The Power of Children," which has become an icon of the museum. The exhibition takes visitors on a journey through the lives of three children who faced profound trials and emerged as heroes of the 20th century—Ruby Bridges, Anne Frank, and Ryan White. All three of these children's stories exemplify Ruby's belief that every individual can make a difference.

As a lecturer, Ruby brings her message to children and adults nationwide. She also established the Ruby Bridges Foundation to promote the values of tolerance, respect and appreciation of all differences through educational programs. A major focus of the foundation has been a program called Ruby's Bridges, which connects students, parents, and educators from different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The goal of the program is to build lasting relationships, which will allow individuals to transcend their differences and achieve racial reconciliation. One of the strategies of Ruby's Bridges is to involve students in service learning projects that foster a sense of community responsibility. From planting trees and caring for the environment at state parks to working with others in need, the program has provided students with the skills to collaborate on meaningful causes. The ultimate goal of the foundation is to move first our children and then our society as a whole toward the elimination of racism and prejudice.

### Ruby's Story

Ruby Nell Bridges was born in Tylertown, Mississippi in 1954, the same year as the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Her grandparents were sharecroppers, but like many people in rural areas, Ruby's family moved to New Orleans in search of better opportunities. Her father worked as a service station attendant and her mother took night jobs to help support the family. They lived in the front part of a large rooming house on France Street in the Florida neighborhood. Like the rest of the Ninth Ward, the Florida area was predominantly working class. While both whites and blacks lived in the neighborhood, residents were segregated by block. Of course the schools were segregated as well; though Ruby lived only five blocks from William Frantz Elementary, she had to walk much further to attend Johnson Lockett, the school reserved for African American students.

Ruby went on to finish grammar school at Frantz and to attend an integrated high school. After her parents divorced, Ruby's mother was forced to move the family out of the house on Frantz Street and into the nearby Florida housing project. After graduating from high school, Ruby wanted to attend college, but she did not have anyone to guide her through the process. She later became a travel agent, married, and raised four sons. In the early 1990s, Ruby's youngest brother, Milton, was killed in a drug-related shooting.

Though the incident was traumatic, it awakened in Ruby a social consciousness about the issues facing children and adults in urban areas. In particular, she began to put her past experiences into perspective.

The fight for school integration was hard fought, and it represented an extremely significant milestone in the Civil Rights Movement. Sadly here in New Orleans, as in other cities across the nation, the victory was short-lived. By the time Ruby began to volunteer at her alma mater, William Frantz, it had long since become segregated again. The neighborhood around the school had also deteriorated with increasing poverty and crime rates.

Inspired by her desire to help children achieve their hopes and dreams, the Ruby Bridges Foundation was established. The foundation began taking small steps to achieve a grand vision- to provide children with an equal opportunity to succeed. Appropriately the work began at Frantz, where the foundation started an after-school program featuring multicultural arts classes. Later, a program called Ruby's Bridges was developed to promote cultural understanding through community service.

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