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## **Creative Team to Re-imagine *Porgy and Bess* Production to Open American Repertory Theater's 2011-2012 Season**

Cambridge, Mass — The American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) announced today that Artistic Director Diane Paulus, Pulitzer prize-winning writer Suzan-Lori Parks, and two-time Obie winner Diedre Murray have been chosen by the Gershwin Trusts and the Heyward Trust to re-imagine the Gershwins' seminal American opera *Porgy and Bess*. The creative team also includes choreographer Ronald K. Brown, set designer and regular A.R.T. collaborator Riccardo Hernandez, costume designer and Project Runway finalist Emilio Sosa, Tony Award-winning lighting designer Christopher Akerlind, sound by Acme Sound Partners, and casting by Telsey + Company who cast *The Color Purple* and *La Bohème* on Broadway. This production of *Porgy and Bess* will be presented in association with Jeffrey Richards and Jerry Frankel and is currently scheduled to open the A.R.T.'s 2011-2012 season in early September 2011.

Spokespersons from the Gershwin family remarked, "The fusion of musical styles in *Porgy and Bess* is distinctly American. It has had, and continues to have, a successful life in opera houses around the world yet it contains some of America's most beloved jazz and popular standards. The Gershwin family and the Heyward trustees are thrilled that the American Repertory Theater will be premiering a re-imagining of *Porgy and Bess* for a whole new generation of theatergoers. We cannot wait to see the results of Diane Paulus', Suzan-Lori Parks', and Diedre Murray's collaboration as they venture forth from the original. We believe audiences will fall in love with their vision of this masterwork for the 21<sup>st</sup> century."

In a meeting with the creative team, Diane Paulus commented, "The Gershwin and Heyward estates have given us the charge to create a version of *Porgy and Bess* that will have a unique identity as a musical. I am delighted to be working with Suzan-Lori Parks on making the characters in the story more fully realized. With one of the most incredible scores ever written, we want to bring *Porgy and Bess* to life on the musical stage in a way that feels essential, immediate, and passionate."

Suzan-Lori Parks added, "I am thrilled to be part of the wonderful team working on *Porgy and Bess*. Our approach is fresh and respectful; we're working to retain all the best-loved elements of the original while crafting a piece that speaks to contemporary audiences."

Diedre Murray said, "We want to move the story of *Porgy and Bess* forward on its continuum, re-envisioning it for a modern perspective. We will acknowledge the timelessness of this masterpiece, and stay true to its original spirit while illuminating this work and exploring it in a new way."

*Porgy and Bess* first premiered at the Colonial Theatre in Boston on September 30, 1935, with a libretto by DuBose and Dorothy Heyward based on DuBose's novel *Porgy*, and their play of the same name. Broadway performances followed featuring a cast of classically trained African-American singers — a daring and visionary artistic choice at the time.

Tickets for this production will be made available as part of the American Repertory Theater subscription series and A.R.T. members and subscribers will receive priority access to tickets. Subscriptions and memberships for the 2011-2012 season will be available for sale during the spring of 2011 at [www.americanrepertorytheater.org](http://www.americanrepertorytheater.org).

## ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM

**Ronald K. Brown** is a choreographer and founder of the New York-based contemporary dance ensemble Evidence, A Dance Company. In addition to his work with Evidence, Brown has created work for the African American Dance Ensemble, Philadanco, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (*Grace* in 1999, *Serving Nia* in 2001, *IFE/My Heart* in 2005 and *Dancing Spirit* in 2010), Ailey II, Cinque Folkloric Dance Theater, Jennifer Muller/The Works, and Jeune Ballet d'Afrique Noire. He has collaborated with such artists as composer/designer Omotayo Wunmi Olaiya, the late writer Craig G. Harris, director Ernie McClintock's Jazz Actors Theater, choreographers Patricia Hoffbauer and Rokiya Kone, and composers Robert Ee, Oliver Lake, Bernadette Speech, David Simons, and Don Meissner. Brown has received numerous awards and fellowships including a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in Choreography, a National Endowment for the Arts Choreographer's Fellowship, a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in choreography, New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie), a Black Theater Alliance Award, the American Dance Festival Humphrey/Weidman/Limón Award, and fellowships from the Edward and Sally van Lier Fund. In addition, Brown was named Def Dance Jam Workshop Mentor of the Year in 2000. In 2003, he received an AUDELCO (Black Theatre Award) for his choreography for *Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats*, originally produced by the McCarter Theater and presented off-Broadway in 2003. In fall 2006, Brown received The United States Artists Rose Fellowship. He was one of only four choreographers of 50 artists to receive the inaugural award.

**Diedre Murray** is a Pulitzer Prize finalist, two-time Obie Winner and master musician. An innovative composer, cellist, producer and curator, her credits include *Unending Pain*, co-presented by the Performance Garage and the Whitney Museum of American Art; *Lets Go Down to the River*, for the Willasau Jazz Festival in Switzerland; *The Eves of Nhor*, for National Dutch Radio and De Effenaar Festival in Eindhoven Holland; *Five Minute Tango*, for the inaugural concert at the Danny Kaye/Sylvia Fine Playhouse, performed by the Manhattan Brass Quintet; *You Don't Miss the Water*, a music-theatre piece, in collaboration with noted poet Cornelius Eady, produced by the Music-Theatre Group (MTG); *Women In The Dunes*, a dance piece created by Blondel Cummings for the Japan Society; the jazz-opera *Running Man*, for which she wrote the original story, score, and book with Cornelius Eady, won two Obie Awards, and was named a finalist for the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Drama; music arrangements for *Eli's Coming* for which she won an Obie Award; *The Blackamour Angel*, a cabaret opera written by Carl Hancock Rux; an adaptation by Diane Paulus of James Baldwin's *Another Country*; *The Voice Within* co-written with Marcus Gardley, and produced by Harlem Stage and the Apollo Theatre; and *Best of Both Worlds* with writer Randy Weiner, directed by Diane Paulus, featured in the *Shakespeare Exploded!* festival at the A.R.T. in 2009.

**Suzan-Lori Parks** is one of the most exciting and acclaimed playwrights in American drama today. She was named one of *TIME* magazine's "100 Innovators for the Next New Wave," and is the first African-American woman to receive the Pulitzer Prize in Drama for the Broadway hit *Topdog/Underdog*. Other plays include *In the Blood* (2000 Pulitzer Prize finalist), *Venus* (1996 Obie Award), *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World, Fucking A*, *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* (1990 Obie Award for Best New American Play), and *The America Play* (produced at the A.R.T. in 1994). Her Ray Charles musical, *Unchain My Heart* is scheduled to premiere on Broadway in the spring of 2011. Her screenplays include *Girl 6* for Spike Lee and her adaptation of Zora Neale Hurston's classic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* for ABC's "Oprah Winfrey Presents". In 2007 her project *365 Plays/365 Days* was produced in over 700 theaters worldwide, creating one of the largest grassroots collaborations in theater history. Her first novel, *Getting Mother's Body*, was published by Random House in 2003. She is a MacArthur "Genius" Award recipient, and has been awarded grants from numerous organizations including the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the New York State Council on the Arts and the New York Foundation for the Arts, and a Guggenheim Foundation Grant. She has received a Lila-Wallace Reader's

Digest Award and a CalArts/Alpert Award in the Arts (Drama). Suzan-Lori Parks is an alumnae of New Dramatists and her work is the subject of the PBS Film *The Topdog Diaries*.

**Diane Paulus** is the Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theater, where she helmed *The Donkey Show*, *Best of Both Worlds*, and *Johnny Baseball* in her inaugural season. Her recent theater credits include The Public Theater's revival of *Hair* on Broadway (2009 Tony Award winner for Best Revival of a Musical, nominated for 8 Tony Awards including Best Director, as well as winner of a Drama Desk Award, Outer Critics Circle Award and Drama League Award for Best Revival of a Musical), London's West End and national tour. Her other recent work includes *Kiss Me, Kate* (Glimmerglass Opera) and *Lost Highway* (ENO co-production with the Young Vic.) Opera credits include *Il Mondo Della Luna* (Gotham Chamber Opera at the Hayden Planetarium), *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Turn Of The Screw*, *Così fan tutte*; and *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, and *Orfeo* at the Chicago Opera Theater. Diane is a Part-Time Professor of the Practice in the Harvard University faculty of Arts and Sciences' Department of English. Her upcoming work at the A.R.T. includes *Prometheus Bound* and *Death and The Powers: The Robots' Opera*.

#### **ABOUT THE AMERICAN REPERTORY THEATER**

The American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) is one of the country's most celebrated resident theaters and the winner of numerous awards—including the Tony Award, the Pulitzer Prize and regional Elliot Norton and I.R.N.E. Awards. In 2002 the A.R.T. was the recipient of the National Theatre Conference's Outstanding Achievement Award, and in May of 2003 it was named one of the top three regional theaters in the country by *Time* magazine.

Founded by Robert Brustein in 1980, the A.R.T. during its 30-year history has welcomed many major American and international theater artists, presenting a diverse repertoire that includes new American plays, bold reinterpretations of classical texts and provocative new music theater productions. The A.R.T. has performed throughout the U.S. and worldwide in 21 cities in 16 countries on 4 continents. It has presented over 200 productions, over half of which were premieres of new plays, translations and adaptations.

The A.R.T. is also a training ground for young artists. The Theater's artistic staff teaches undergraduate classes in acting, directing, dramatic literature, dramaturgy, design and playwriting at Harvard University, and in 1987 the A.R.T. founded the Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University in conjunction with the Moscow Art Theater School. The Institute provides world-class graduate level training in acting, dramaturgy and voice.

In 2009, the A.R.T. welcomed its new Artistic Director, Diane Paulus. Armed with the A.R.T.'s mission to expand the boundaries of theater, Paulus and her team have engaged thousands of new theatergoers at performances of *Sleep No More*, *The Donkey Show*, *Gatz*, *Best of Both Worlds*, *Johnny Baseball* and *Cabaret* as well as festivals like *Emerging America*. Critics and audiences have embraced the immersive environments that have become hallmarks of A.R.T. productions. The Theater has broadened its focus to include the audience's total experience, providing them with a sense of ownership in the theatrical event. Initiatives like the A.R.T.'s new club theater OBERON, which Paulus calls a "second stage for the 21st century", is an example of one initiative that has not only become an incubator for local artists but also has attracted national attention as a groundbreaking model for programming. Through all of its work, the A.R.T. is committed to building a community of artists, designers, technicians, administrators and audience.

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