



NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact (for media only): Lucy Pollak

(818) 887-1499 lucy@lucypr.com

"**TREE**" **EST-LA's production of Julie Hébert's moving and poetic World Premiere play opens 2009-10 season of new work at [Inside] the Ford.**

LOS ANGELES - Three generations divided by race, culture and time connect when a white Southern woman discovers old love letters leading her to an African American half-brother. The **World Premiere** of **TREE** by **Julie Hébert** is presented by **Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA** at **[Inside] the Ford** beginning **November 7**, the first offering in a curated season of new works from three L.A.-based theater companies. **Jessica Kubzansky** directs **Chuma Gault**, **Sloan Robinson**, **Tessa Thompson** and **Jacqueline Wright**.

As America debates whether the election of Barack Obama has rendered our nation "post-racial," Hébert's provocative, poetic and powerfully moving new play asks: How can we move past racial differences and find a common language?

Hébert grew up in the deep South during the turbulence of integration and the official and unofficial repeal of Jim Crow laws. "I have a good friend, from a small town in south Louisiana near where I grew up. We share that culture and have much in common, but because she is African American her experience growing up was vastly different from mine. This play is an attempt to have a deep, true conversation between people who are linked in many ways, but separated by race."

Race relations is only one thematic layer in Hébert's intricate and highly theatrical new work. Eloquently melding realism and poetry, *TREE* is also a play about family and memory.

African American chef Leo Price (Chuma Gault) is living in Chicago caring for an aging mother with dementia (Sloan Robinson) and his college-age daughter, J.J. (Tessa Thompson) when white Gender Studies professor Didi Marcantel (Jacqueline Wright) barges into his life with a provocative cache of love letters she has discovered. From the addled memories of Jessalyn Price come contradictory stories of her dangerous interracial romance with Didi's father.

Hébert was partially inspired by the 200-plus letters that her father wrote to her mother during the Korean War when he was only 19, and the idea that "your parent had a life before you that is unknown and very mysterious to a kid. Who was this boy who became my father?"

"The language is lyrical, rich and infused with the cadences of French Louisiana," notes Kubzansky. "*TREE* is about investigating the past and its impact on the future. It's about the sandwich generation - what happens when you end up taking care of other people's lives instead of your own? It's about discovering in the middle of your life that there's another person on the planet who might just 'get' you enough to push you to face yourself."

Currently a co-Executive Producer for the CBS series *Numb3rs*, Julie Hébert's career started in San Francisco with the Eureka Theater, the Magic Theater and Intersection for the Arts. She then went on to work throughout the country with the Los Angeles Theater Center, San Diego

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Rep, Steppenwolf, Provincetown Playhouse, Circle Rep, La MaMa and many others. She was an early member of the Bay Area Playwrights Festival and a long-time member of the Padua Hills Playwrights Festival. She also served as Artistic Director of Theater at the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans for four years. Her plays include: *Touch the Water*; *Abe Lincoln's Dog*; *The Knee Desires the Dirt*; *Almost Asleep*; *True Beauties*; *St. Joan and the Dancing Sickness*; *In the Privacy of Strangers*; and *Ruby's Bucket of Blood*, which she also adapted into a film for Showtime starring Angela Bassett. She has received grants from the NEA, TCG, AT&T New Plays, the Rockefeller Foundation and the California Arts Council for writing, directing and inter-disciplinary arts. Playwriting honors include the Pen Award for Drama; Susan Smith Blackburn Prize; first runner-up, the Bay Area Critics Circle Best Play; NAACP nomination; several Drama-Logue Awards; and a cover article in American Theater magazine. She served as a dramaturge for the 2005 O'Neill Playwrights Conference. Her plays are published by Dramatic Publishing, Plays in Process, and in the Best of the West anthology. She is an alumna of New Dramatists and Alternate ROOTS. Most recently, Julie has worked with Cornerstone Theater to create a play about the Los Angeles River and with Open Fist in their summer festival. Julie wrote the screenplays for *Female Perversions* (October Films), *All-American Girl: The Mary Kay LeTourneau Story* (USA), and *Lying Awake* (HBO) adapted from the novel by Mark Salzman. In 2002, Julie received a Peabody Award for *In Their Own Words*, a documentary film of interviews with survivors of the 9/11 attacks in New York.

Jessica Kubzansky is the co-Artistic Director of The Theatre @ Boston Court in Pasadena and an award-winning director working around the country at the Pasadena Playhouse, Geffen Playhouse, South Coast Rep, Portland Center Stage, Mark Taper Forum/Kirk Douglas New Works, Laguna Playhouse, Aurora, and American Stage Co. Recent productions include the critically acclaimed *Hamlet* with Leo Marks at Theater 150 and Theresa Rebeck's *Mauritius* at the Pasadena Playhouse. Kubzansky specializes in new work; recent world premieres include *Gulls*; Salamone/McIntyre's musical adaptation of *The Seagull*; Mickey Birnbaum's *Bleed Rail*; Carlos Murillo's *Unfinished American Highwayscape #9 & 32*; Jean-Claude van Itallie's *Light*; Cody Henderson's *Cold/Tender* (all at T@BC); Bob Clyman's *Tranced* (Laguna Playhouse); Bryan Davidson's *War Music* (Geffen Playhouse and LATC); Sheila Callaghan's *Kate Crackernuts* (24th St. Theatre); Julia Cho's *BFE* (Portland Center Stage JAW/WEST). Other recent work: Hare/Brecht's *Mother Courage* (T@BC); *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (Illinois Shakespeare Festival); *The Glass Menagerie*; *Toys in the Attic* (The Colony Theatre); *Measure for Measure* (A Noise Within); *Amy's View* (International City Theatre); and many others. Kubzansky received the 2004 Los Angeles' Drama Critics' Circle's Margaret Harford Award for Sustained Excellence in Theater.

Chuma Gault (Leo Price) previously appeared in Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA productions of *Stage Directions* (LA Weekly Award for Comedy Ensemble); *Love Water*; and *The Last Seder*. He was nominated for the LA Weekly Award for Best Actor in a Lead Role for *Miss Julie* (Fountain Theatre). Other work includes *The Lion in Winter* (Roundabout Theatre, NY); *The Waverly Gallery* (The Vineyard Playhouse, MA); *Gunplay* (The Actors' Gang, LA); and *Jitney* (Actor's Theater of Louisville).

Sloan Robinson (Jessalyn Price) received the 2001 NAACP Theatre Award for Best Female Lead for her portrayal of Dorothy Dandridge in the one woman tour de force *Yesterday Came Too Soon... The Dorothy Dandridge Story* by Jamal Williams. The production, co-produced by Ms. Robinson's company, Do It Yourself Productions, also received seven other nominations. She received the award again in 2004 for her autobiographical one woman play *It's A Good Thing I Knew How To Dance*, also co-produced by DIYP, as well as four other nominations for the production. Ms. Robinson's one woman play, *Bananas! A Day In The Life Of Josephine Baker*, garnered her a 2008 NAACP nomination as Best Female Lead, and the play won Best Music Director and Best Costumes.

Tessa Thompson's (J.J. Price) theater credits include *Pyrenees* (CTG at the Kirk Douglas); *Romeo and Juliet: Antebellum New Orleans 1836*; *Summertime*; *Pera Palas* (The Theater @

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Boston Court); *Twelfth Night* (A Noise Within); *Indoor/Outdoor* (The Colony); and *Stupid Kids* (Celebration Theater). TV credits include regular roles on the CW's *Veronica Mars* and *Hidden Palms*; recurring roles on this season of *Heroes* and *Private Practice*; and appearances on *Life; Mental; Grey's Anatomy*; and *Cold Case*. Ms. Thompson recently won a Grand Jury Prize for her work in the critically acclaimed independent feature *Mississippi Damned*. Upcoming films include *Periphery*; *Exquisite Corpse*; *Red & Blue Marbles*; and *Everyday Black Man*. She is a member of the esteemed classical company Antaeus and sings locally with the LA Ladies Choir.

Jacqueline Wright's (Didi Marcantel) theater roles include: Land Lady in *Killers*; Tommy in *Eat Me* (LA Weekly nomination); Richard in *Richard III*; Buddy in *Buddy Buddette*; Clytemnestra in *Clyt at Home* (LA Weekly Award); Emilia in *And Still The Dogs* (LA Weekly nomination); and covering the role of Catherine in *By the Waters of Babylon* at the Geffen Playhouse. Films credits: *Burn After Reading*; *Enough*; *10,000 Days*; *Wednesday Again*; *North Country*; *Walkout*; *Paul McCarthy's Caribbean Pirates*; and Catherine Sullivan's *Five Economies* (*Big Hunt/little hunt*). As a playwright, Jacqueline's plays have been produced by The Echo Theatre Company, EST, Theatre of Note, Cal Arts, Occidental College, HBO, The Road and Circus Theatrics. Her production of *Eat Me* received six LA Weekly nominations including playwriting. Her production of *Spider Bites* had a beautifully executed run at Theatre of Note and her play *Love Water* recently premiered as an EST-LA/Open Fist co-production. Wright is a 2005 Jerome Fellowship alternate and a member of the Dog Ear writers' collective.

Scenic and Lighting Design for *TREE* are by **Brian Sidney Bembridge**; Original Music and Sound Design are by **Bruno Louchouarn**; Costume Design is by **Leah Piehl**; Production Stage Manager is **Rebecca Cohn**; Associate Producer is **Rod Menzies**; and **Laura Jane Salvato** and **Isabel Storey** produce for EST-LA.

Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA is one of Los Angeles' premier developmental and producing theaters and an offshoot of the renowned New York company that developed many of the most accomplished voices in the American theater, including Christopher Durang, Richard Greenberg, David Mamet, Marsha Norman, José Rivera, Shel Silverstein, John Patrick Shanley and Wendy Wasserstein. EST-LA develops and produces new work by established and emerging playwrights, and provides a lifelong artistic home to its membership of over 150 theater professionals led by Artistic Directors **Tom Jacobson** and **Gates McFadden**, Managing Director **Lukus Grace**, and acting Producing Director Isabel Storey.

The 2009-10 Season at [Inside] the Ford is supported by the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and the Ford Theatre Foundation, with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. *TREE* is presented with the support of the Harold and Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust and the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

TREE runs **Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm and Sundays at 3 pm and 7pm, November 7 through December 13**. There will be one **Wednesday** evening performance on **December 9 at 8 pm**. Thursday November 26 (Thanksgiving) will be dark. Two previews take place on Thursday, November 5 and Friday, November 6, both at 8 pm. General admission is **\$20**; seniors and full-time students with ID are **\$12**; previews and all Thursday evening performances are **Pay-What-You-Can**.

[Inside] the Ford is located in the Ford Theatres complex at **2580 Cahuenga Blvd. East, Hollywood, CA 90068**, just off the 101 Hollywood Freeway across from the Hollywood Bowl and south of Universal Studios. **On-site, non-stacked parking is free**. For reservations and information, call the **Ford Theatres Box Office** at **323.461.3673** (323.GO1.FORD) or go to www.FordTheatres.org.

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Details for Calendar Listings

"**TREE**"

WHAT:

TREE - Three generations divided by race, culture and time connect when a white Southern woman discovers old love letters leading her to an African American half-brother. Leo Price is living in Chicago, caring for his aging mother who suffers from dementia and is often lost in the Louisiana Delta of her mind, when white Gender Studies professor Didi Marcantel barges into his life. As America debates whether the election of Barack Obama has rendered our nation "post-racial," Julie Hébert's provocative, poetic and powerfully moving new play asks: How can we move past racial differences and find a common language?

WHO:

Written by **Julie Hébert**

Directed by **Jessica Kubzansky**

Starring **Chuma Gault, Sloan Robinson, Tessa Thompson and Jacqueline Wright**

Produced by **Laura Jane Salvato and Isabel Storey**

Presented by **Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA**, Tom Jacobson and Gates McFadden Artistic Directors

WHEN:

Previews: November 5, 6

Performances: November 7 through December 13

Performance Schedule:

Wednesday at 8 pm: December 9 (one Wednesday night performance only)

Thursdays at 8 pm: November 5 (preview), 12, 19; December 3, 10 (dark Thanksgiving)

Fridays at 8 pm: November 6 (preview), 13, 20, 27; December 4, 11

Saturdays at 8 pm : November 7 (Opening Night), 14, 21, 28; December 5, 12

Sundays at 3 pm: November 8, 15, 22, 29; December 6, 13

Sundays at 7 pm: November 8, 15, 22, 29; December 6, 13

WHERE:

[Inside] the Ford

2580 Cahuenga Blvd. East

Hollywood, CA 90068

(just off the 101, across the freeway from the Hollywood Bowl and south of Universal Studios)

HOW:

(323) 461-3673 (GO 1-FORD) or www.FordTheatres.org

TICKETS:

General admission: **\$20**

Seniors and full-time students with ID: **\$12**

All Thursday performances: **Pay-What-You-Can**

Previews: **Pay-What-You-Can**

PARKING:

FREE on-site (non-stacked)

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