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**CUTTING BALL THEATER CONTINUES 10TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON
WITH NEW PLAY BY MARCUS GARDLEY
“...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI”
March 12-April 11, 2010**

SAN FRANCISCO (February 12, 2010) – San Francisco’s cutting-edge **Cutting Ball Theater** continues its 10th season with **...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI**, a new play by **Marcus Gardley**. A co-production with Playwrights Foundation, **...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI** was workshopped during *Risk is This...The Cutting Ball New Experimental Plays Festival*, the only play festival in America solely dedicated to experimental works for the stage. **Amy Mueller** directs this profoundly moving story, featuring **David Sinaiko, David Westley Skillman, Martin F. Grizzell, Jr., Nicole C. Julien, Sarah Mitchell, Jeanette Harrison, and Zac Schuman**, along with **Erica Richardson, Rebecca Frank, Halili Knox**, and introducing **Erika McCrary**. **...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI** plays **March 12 through April 11** (*Press opening: March 19*) at the Cutting Ball Theater in residence at EXIT on Taylor (277 Taylor Street) in San Francisco. For tickets (\$15-30) and more information, the public may visit **cuttingball.com** or call **800-838-3006**.

Set on the banks of the Mississippi during the Civil War **...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI** is a poetic journey of forgiveness and redemption. Inspired by the myth of Demeter and Persephone, this deeply personal play combines traditional storytelling, gospel music, and a wicked sense of humor to create a rich, imaginative world that allows trees to preach, rivers to waltz, and Jesus to moonwalk.

About the production playwright Marcus Gardley says, “**...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI** is in a lot of ways my signature play . . . this play has a personal resonance to me because it is based upon a story my great-grandmother used to tell about her father who fled the bonds of slavery and traveled the country in search of his family . . . It is my hope that the play opens the door for dialogue about the impact of myth, spirituality, and history on our national culture.” One of the Bay Area’s most important new poet-playwrights, Gardley was among *Dramatists Magazine*’s 50 writers to watch in 2007.

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"For me, the spirit of this play is a deeply poetic expression of African-American culture and that specific experience in America," says director Amy Mueller. "The power and meaning of the Mississippi River to African-Americans, expressed so beautifully by Langston Hughes in his iconic poem, is fully explored in this play for all its resonant power — the role of the River in the underground railroad, in the Civil War, in the life-blood of the South, and in its exceptional beauty and role in agriculture and wealth. So for me, to work with the embodiment of that image in the character of the Mississippi River is a theatrical journey of a lifetime."

"...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI has a mythic landscape and is epic in scope, yet the story is truly simple: that of two families poised on the brink of an unknown future, their fates intertwined. The play poses a singular, but complex, question about what it means to be free," continues Mueller. "The production is full of many, many powerful images and phenomenal poetic language, and it is indeed a huge pleasure to stage. In directing this production, my hope is that audiences walk away with a deeper, emotional understanding of our American past, and see themselves fully in that patchwork landscape."

"When I was on the reading committee for the Bay Area Playwrights Festival in 2002, I read a play that just blew me away," says Cutting Ball Artistic Director Rob Melrose. "It was gorgeous poetry for the stage that had a deep personal truth behind it; it was called *like sun fallin' in the mouth* by Marcus Gardley. Marcus was still in graduate school at Yale when he wrote it and he was included in the festival as the emerging playwright. Now, just eight years later, his plays have been produced all over the country and he is no longer an 'emerging' playwright, but rather one of our country's great playwrights."

Continues Melrose, "Playwrights Foundation Artistic Director, and longtime Marcus Gardley champion, Amy Mueller, brought ...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI to me for consideration in our 2007 *Risk is This...The Cutting Ball Theater New Plays Festival*. I selected it to be part of the festival and fell deeply in love with the play. After tirelessly fundraising to present a full production, it is quite an honor for us to produce this new play, which promises to be a highlight of Cutting Ball's 10th anniversary season."

The Cutting Ball Theater has assembled a gifted ensemble for ...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI. Returning to the Cutting Ball stage is Associate Artist **David Sinaiko** as Jean Verse. Sinaiko appeared in Cutting Ball's productions of *The Bald Soprano*, *Victims of Duty*, *Endgame*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It*, *The Sandalwood Box*, *Ajax for Instance*, *Macbeth*, *365 Plays/365*

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Days, *Woyzeck*, and *Chain Reactions*, and as part of The Hidden Classics Reading Series and *Risk is This...The Cutting Ball New Experimental Plays Festival*. Other recent credits include Golden Thread's *Jihad Jones & the Kalashnikov Babes*, Crowded Fire's *Wreckage*, and SF Playhouse's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Additionally, Sinaiko has been seen at the Goodman Theatre, The Actor's Gang, and in the popular Bay Area one-man production of David Sedaris' *SantaLand Diaries*; he was a founding member of Chicago's New Crime Productions.

Also returning to the Cutting Ball stage is Associate Artist **David Westley Skillman** as Jesus. Skillman was featured in Cutting Ball's *Risk is This . . .The Cutting Ball New Experimental Plays Festival*, *Alien Motel*, *Wet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*. Recent productions include Christina Anderson's *Drip* at Crowded Fire and Suzan-Lori Parks' *The America Play* at Thick Description, where he also appeared in Octavio Solis' *Gibraltar* in a co-production with San Jose Stage Company. Additional credits include productions at Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, Central Works, Theater First, African-American Shakespeare Company, SF Fringe Festival, and FoolsFury.

Martin F. Grizzell, Jr. makes his debut at Cutting Ball Theater as Brer Bit. Grizzell has worked with The Interdisciplinary Dance Theatre of Holland, and was most recently featured in San Francisco's African-American Shakespeare Company's production of *Cinderella*. Grizzell may also be seen in the Internet drama *Noah's Ark* and in the International 48-Hour Film Shoot-Out film *A Better Place*.

Also making their Cutting Ball debuts are **Nicole C. Julien** as Miss Ssippi, **Sarah Mitchell** as Blanche Verse, and **Jeanette Harrison** as Cadence Verse. Nicole C. Julien's Bay Area credits include productions at City Lights Theater Company (*Hair*), Magic Theatre (*Rust*), Shotgun Players (*Cabaret*), and SF Playhouse (*Man of LaMancha*). Sarah Mitchell's recent credits include productions at Shotgun Players (*The Norman Conquests*, *The Farm*), SF Playhouse (*Abraham Lincoln's Big Gay Dance Party*), and Impact Theatre (*See How We Are*); she is a company member with Killing My Lobster. Jeanette Harrison has participated in readings, workshops, or premieres with Theatre Rhino, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Lorraine Hansberry Theatre, Playhouse West, Golden Thread Productions, Aurora Theatre Company, and Magic Theatre; she is a founding member of AlterTheater Ensemble, where she will appear later this spring in Caryl Churchill's *Owners*.

Zac Schuman returns to the Cutting Ball stage as Yankee Pot Roast in **...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI**; he previously appeared in *Risk is This...The Cutting Ball New Experimental Plays Festival* and was most recently seen in *History Boys* at New Conservatory Theatre Center.

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Rounding out the talented cast are **Erica Richardson** (*Rent Boy Avenue* at Box Car Theater Company; *Hair* at Willows Theater Company), **Rebecca Frank** (*This World in a Woman's Hands* at Shotgun Players), and **Halili Knox** (*The Story* at SF Playhouse/Lorraine Hansberry Theatre) as the Chorus. **Erika McCrary** makes her Cutting Ball debut as Free Girl; credits include a role in the award-winning independent film *Law & Disorder*.

...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI director **Amy Mueller** has directed and produced original theater for the past 20 years. She is the Artistic Director of San Francisco's Playwrights Foundation, where she has transformed the organization into a year-round national center for playwrights and new play development. She directed the development of *The Fourth Messenger*, a new musical by Tanya Shaffer, with whom she developed and directed the award-winning play *Let My Enemy Live Long!* at Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Additionally, Mueller served as producer/dramaturg on *365 Plays/365 Days Week Three* by Suzann Lori Parks and *One Big Lie* by Liz Duffy Adams, and was co-creator of The Mandala Olive Project (with Denmo Ibrahim). Additional directing credits include productions at Golden Thread Productions (*Coming Home* by Motti Lerner, *Between The Eyes* by Naomi Wallace), American Conservatory Theater, San Diego Repertory Theatre, and Arizona Theatre Company.

A native of West Oakland, **Marcus Gardley** is a multiple award-winning poet-playwright who recently won the prestigious 2008 Helen Merrill Award and a Kesselring honor. His two most recent plays, *This World in a Woman's Hands* (October 2009) and *Love is a Dream House in Lorin* (March 2007), both received outstanding critical acclaim and sold-out runs at Shotgun Players (the latter was nominated for the National Critics Steinberg New Play Award). Additional works for the stage include *dance of the holy ghost* (Yale Repertory Theatre), which is now under a commercial Broadway option, *(L)imitations of Life* (Empty Space), and *like sun fallin' in the mouth* (National Black Theatre Festival). He is the recipient of the San Francisco Bay Area's Gerbode Emerging Playwright Award, the National Alliance for Musical Theatre Award, a Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation Grant, a NEA/TCG Playwriting Participant Residency, the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Scholarship, and the ASCAP Cole Porter Prize. He holds an MFA in Playwriting from the Yale Drama School and is a member of New Dramatists, The Dramatists Guild, and the Lark Play Development Center. His play *On the Levee* will premiere at Lincoln Center in July. Gardley currently teaches Playwriting and African-American studies at Umass Amherst.

The talented design team for **...AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI** includes Cutting Ball Associate Artists **Heather Basarab** (lights), **Cliff Caruthers** (music and sound), and **Michael**

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Locher (sets); the production also features dramaturgy by **Nakissa Etemad**, costumes by **Callie Floor**, choreography by **Rami Margron**, and musical direction by **Erica Richardson**.

Co-founded in 1999 by theater artists Rob Melrose and Paige Rogers, Cutting Ball Theater presents avant-garde works of the past, present, and future by re-envisioning classics, exploring seminal avant-garde texts, and developing new experimental plays. In addition to Playwrights Foundation, Cutting Ball Theater has partnered with the Magic Theatre and Z Space New Plays Initiative to commission new experimental works. The company has produced a number of World Premieres, West Coast Premieres, and re-imagined various classics. Recipient of the 2008 *San Francisco Bay Guardian* Goldie award for outstanding talent in the performing arts, Cutting Ball Theater earned the Best of SF award in 2006 from *SF Weekly* and was selected by *San Francisco Magazine* as Best Classic Theater in 2007. Cutting Ball Theater was recently featured in the February 2010 issue of *American Theatre Magazine*.

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FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT:

Set on the banks of the Mississippi during the Civil War ...**AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI** is a poetic journey of forgiveness and redemption. Inspired by the myth of Demeter and Persephone, this deeply personal fantasy play combines traditional storytelling, gospel music, and a wicked sense of humor to create a rich, imaginative world that allows trees to preach, rivers to waltz, and Jesus to moonwalk. **Amy Mueller** directs this profoundly moving story. A co-production with Playwrights Foundation, ...**AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI** was workshopped during *Risk is This...The Cutting Ball New Experimental Plays Festival*, the only play festival in America solely dedicated to experimental works for the stage.

WHEN:

Previews: March 12, 13, 18 at 8pm, March 14 at 5pm

Opens: March 19 at 8pm

Press opening: Friday, March 19 at 8pm

Closes: April 11 at 5pm

All performances Thursday-Saturday at 8pm and Sunday at 5pm

WHERE:

The Cutting Ball Theater in residence at EXIT on Taylor
277 Taylor St., San Francisco

TICKETS:

For tickets (\$15-30) and more information, the public may visit **cuttingball.com** or call **800-838-3006**; discounts available for students and seniors

PHOTOS:

Art for ...**AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI** can be found at **http://www.cuttingball.com/press.php** or by emailing **brightbutterfly[at]hotmail.com**

The Cutting Ball Theater's production of ...**AND JESUS MOONWALKS THE MISSISSIPPI** made possible in part by grants from The Compton Foundation, The Creative Work Fund, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the San Francisco Arts Commission, the National Endowment for the Arts, Grants for the Arts / San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, and the Zellerbach Foundation.

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