

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT

Lisa Tawil, ITVS

415-356-8383

lisa_tawil@itvs.org

Mary Lugo

770-623-8190

lugo@negia.net

Cara White

843-881-1480

cara.white@mac.com

For downloadable images, visit pbs.org/pressroom/

***PLAYWRIGHT: FROM PAGE TO STAGE* PREMIERES ON
INDEPENDENT LENS
MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2013 ON PBS**

**Film Traces the Journey of Two Outstanding New Voices in American Theater
From Script to Opening Night**

(San Francisco, CA) — A rare and intimate glimpse into the dynamic process of creating and launching new plays, *Playwright: From Page to Stage* follows two outstanding young playwrights through the writing, development, staging, rehearsal, and public performance of their plays. Over the course of three years, the dramatic parallel journeys of Rajiv Joseph and Tarell Alvin McCraney unfold, from the time their work receives development funding until the riveting climax, when one of the productions makes it to Broadway with Robin Williams in a leading role. From acclaimed director Robert Levi, *Playwright: From Page to Stage* premieres on *Independent Lens*, hosted by Stanley Tucci, on Monday, December 16, 2013, 10:00-11:00 p.m. ET on PBS ([check local listings](#)).

When the film begins, McCraney and Joseph are fresh talents bursting onto the scene, both having written probing new plays depicting society in turmoil. Young, black, gay, and from Miami's inner city, McCraney has an unusual background for mainstream American theater. His *Brother/Sister Plays*, a sprawling coming-of-age trilogy set in a fictional black Louisiana community, reflect not only his own life experiences, but also the social and cultural realities of America's underclass.

Joseph is a quiet but charismatic young Indian-American from Cleveland who traveled to Africa for a three-year stint in the Peace Corps after graduating from college. His *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* is a phantasmagorical exploration of war-torn Iraq, seen through multiple sets of dual perspectives — Americans and Iraqis, soldiers and civilians, animals and humans, men and women, the comic and the tragic, the living and the dead.

With extraordinary access at every step, *Playwright: From Page to Stage* brings to life the intense collaborations and emotionally charged process that takes place when teams of writers, directors, actors, and producers pool their talents. Intercutting between the two plays, the film goes backstage to reveal the drama and conflict leading up to their opening nights. Will these productions succeed and move to larger venues? Or will these promising productions close, leaving unrealized dreams behind?

From bare-boned rehearsal halls to regional theaters to Broadway, *Playwright: From Page to Stage* captures the arduous challenges — and ultimate triumph — of these controversial new works and the playwrights who created them.

Those featured in the film include David Dower, Director of Artistic Programs at Emerson College's ArtsEmerson performance department; Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director of New York City's Public Theater; Robyn Goodman, producer of the Tony Award-winning *Avenue Q* and *In the Heights*, among others; playwright Katori Hall (*The Mountaintop*); Moises Kaufman, award-winning director and playwright whose most recent play, *33 Variations*, was nominated for five Tony Awards; Steppenwolf Theatre Company member and Broadway director Tina Landau; Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage (*Ruined*); award-winning theater director and playwright Robert O'Hara; and actor and comedian Robin Williams.

Visit the *Playwright: From Page to Stage* companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/playwright>), which features information about the film — including an interview with the filmmaker — plus links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

* * *

Rajiv Joseph just received a 2013 Steinberg Playwright Award. His *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* was a 2010 Pulitzer Prize finalist. Other plays include *The Monster at the Door* (2011), *The North Pool* (2011), *Gruesome Playground Injuries* (2009), *Animals Out of Paper* (2008), and *Huck and Holden* (2005). He wrote the book and was co-lyricist for the Broadway-bound musical, *Fly*, adapted from J.M. Barrie's novel, *Peter Pan*. He was named a 2010 Rockefeller Fellow by United States Artists, and received the Lucille Lortel Award, the Whiting Award, and the Glickman Award. He was a writer on the Showtime series *Nurse Jackie*, and co-wrote *Draft Day*, a 2014 feature dramedy about pro football, directed by Ivan Reitman and starring Kevin Costner and Jennifer Garner.

Tarell Alvin McCraney was recently named a 2013 MacArthur Fellow, recognized as a playwright "exploring the rich diversity of the African American experience in works that imbue the lives of ordinary people with epic significance." In addition to *The Brother/Sister Plays* (2009), his work includes *Head of Passes* (2013), *Choir Boy* (2012), *American Trade* (2011), and *Wig Out!* (2008). He is a member of Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company, has been an International Playwright in Residence at the Royal Shakespeare Company, and is currently directing Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, which will premiere at the Royal Shakespeare Company's stages in November 2013, before coming to Miami's GableStage, followed by a run at New York's Public Theater in January 2014. He also received a Steinberg Playwright Award and *New York Times* Outstanding Playwright Award.

About the Filmmakers

Robert Levi (Producer/Director) is an independent writer, director, producer, and cinematographer. In 2008, his film, *Billy Strayhorn: Lush Life*, which premiered on *Independent Lens*, became the first show in broadcast history to receive the Emmy for Best Documentary, a Peabody Award, and the Writers Guild Award for Best Documentary Screenplay. His film, *Duke Ellington: Reminiscing in Tempo*, premiered on the PBS series *American Experience*, received an Emmy, and later played on A&E's *Biography*. In addition, Levi has received three Best Script nominations from the Writers Guild for other work. He wrote, produced, and directed *Mott Street*, a 35mm dramatic film short for PolyGram, and his work has screened at festivals worldwide, including Berlin, London, Melbourne, Munich, and the AFI Film Festival. As a director of photography, Levi has worked with directors Norman Jewison, Sydney Pollack, and Nick Broomfield, and was a Producer on the Academy Award-winning documentary *Scared Straight*.

Joshua Blum (Producer) is Founder and Executive Producer of Washington Square Films, Inc. His current feature film projects include Executive Producer on *All Is Lost*, a new film starring Robert Redford, and written and directed by J.C. Chandor; and Producer on *Listen Up Philip*, starring Elizabeth Moss and Jason Schwartzman, and directed by Alex Ross Perry, slated for a 2014 release. Past film and television projects he has produced include *Margin Call*, a drama starring Kevin Spacey, Stanley Tucci, Paul Bettany, Simon Baker, and Jeremy Irons, written and directed by J.C. Chandor (nominated for Best Original Screenplay Academy Award in 2011); *Billy Strayhorn: Lush Life*, directed by Robert Levi; *And Everything Is Going Fine*, a film featuring the life of Spalding Gray, directed by Steven Soderbergh; *No Joking*, a half-hour special for The Sundance Channel, celebrating the posthumous pardon of Lenny Bruce, directed by Bob Balaban; and *Old Joy* and *Wendy and Lucy*, both directed by Kelly Reichert.

CREDITS

Producer /Director	Robert Levi
Producers	Joshua Blum Rebecca Halbower
Executive Producer for ITVS	Sally Jo Fifer
Executive Producers for WETA	Dalton Delan David S. Thompson

Playwright: From Page to Stage is a co-production of Robert Levi Films, Inc., Washington Square Films, Inc., and the Independent Television Service (ITVS), produced in association with WETA and PBS, with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is funded by the Corporation for

Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The senior series producer is Lois Vossen. More information at www.pbs.org/independentlens. Join *Independent Lens* on Facebook at www.facebook.com/independentlens.