



NEWS RELEASE

Media Contact:

Meg Lewis

Public Relations Manager

(334) 271-5326

Email: mlewis@asf.net

Alabama Shakespeare Festival to Premiere Play about Legendary Football Coach Paul “Bear” Bryant

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONTGOMERY, AL (Friday December 29, 2008) The Alabama Shakespeare Festival will premiere ***Bear Country***, a new play about the legendary University of Alabama football coach Paul “Bear” Bryant, January 9 – February 15, 2008. The theatre commissioned Michael Vigilant to write the play as part of the theatre’s Southern Writers’ Project. It received its first reading in the 2008 Festival of New Plays and has been workshopped over the past six months. Vigilant consulted some of Bryant’s past players and friends of the Bryant family while writing the play.

Bear Country highlights the wit and wisdom of a man who rose from the child of dirt poor sharecroppers to become the standard by which college football coaches are judged. The play focuses on Coach Bryant’s characteristic leadership style and reveals some of the lesser known anecdotes and stories about his life and career, chronicling his evolution from a young man driven by poverty into an inspiring leader who left an indelible mark on the lives of his players and associates.

“Complex subject matters always make for interesting theatre I believe, and Paul Bryant was a complex human being,” explains director Tim Rhoze. “Bryant’s story had many chapters. The choices of which chapters to present and how to present them were crucial to the goal of telling the story in an entertaining way; so, there is a slightly unorthodox approach to the staging – one in which we adventure into the mind of the man and journey with him through life-changing events, good & bad; funny and sad.”

Michael Vigilant, who is also ASF’s Chief Operating Officer, has been involved with writing and producing plays and musicals for a two decades. As a playwright and lyricist he has more than a dozen works published with Samuel French, Contemporary Drama Service and Pioneer Drama Service. Five of his plays have been picked as catalogue covers. Award winning works include *Cindy Cinderella* (Page Award for Best Musical) and *The Wedding Ring* (MAPT Award for New Work). For his lyric writing efforts Mike has received five ASCAP project grants. Before coming to ASF, Mike was a playwright resident and public relations manager for Michigan’s Meadow Brook Theatre, where he worked with ASF’s current artistic director Geoffrey Sherman.

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Bear Country features a cast of four, including Rodney Clark as Coach Bryant and Gregory Jones as Young Coach Bryant, with John Patrick Hayden and Yaegel T. Welch in multiple roles. Scenic design for *Bear Country* is by Katherine Ross, with costume design by Elizabeth Novak, lighting design by AnneMarie Duggan and sound design by Brett Rominger.

Preliminary ticket sales for *Bear Country* have been brisk, currently exceeding 90% of the projected goal. The theatre is offering "Sideline Specials" which making a half price ticket available with the purchase of a full price adult ticket on Tuesdays and Wednesdays through January 23. Regular price tickets are \$42. For more information call the ASF Box Office toll free at (800) 841-4273 or go online at www.asf.net.

The nationally-acclaimed, award-winning Southern Writers' Project was founded in 1991 as an exploration and celebration of the South's rich story-telling tradition. Today SWP commissions, develops and produces new plays that explore Southern issues and the African-American experience. Through SWP, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival seeks to fulfill its mission of creating theatre that speaks specifically to the people of the region. Endowed by an anonymous donor, the Southern Writers' Project is supported nationally by generous grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and locally by the Central Alabama Community Foundation.

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival is among the largest Shakespeare theatres in the world. Designated as The State Theatre of Alabama, ASF has been located in Montgomery since 1985 when it moved from Anniston as a result of Mr. and Mrs. Wynton M. Blount's gift of a performing arts complex set in the 250-acre Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park.

This program/project has been made possible by grants from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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Fact Sheet

Bear Country **by Michael Vigilant**

2008-2009 Season

Produced by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival

Dates: **Previews:** January 9 and 10, 2009 **Opening:** January 11, 2009

Regular Performances: Jan. 13 – Feb. 15; Saturdays and Sundays only at 2 p.m.

Prices: Preview performances only \$25! Adult tickets are \$42. To purchase, call the ASF Box Office at (334) 271-5353 or toll-free at 1-800-841-4273. Tickets may also be purchased online at www.asf.net.

Location: The Octagon Stage in the Carolyn Blount Theatre, home of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, located in the Wynton M. Blount Cultural Park, on Woodmere Boulevard just off East Boulevard.

Production Staff:	<i>Director</i>	Tim Rhoze
	<i>Scenic Designer</i>	Katherine Ross
	<i>Costume Designer</i>	Elizabeth Novak
	<i>Lighting Designer</i>	AnneMarie Duggan
	<i>Sound Designer</i>	Brett Rominger
	<i>Dramaturg</i>	Marlon Bailey
	<i>Stage Manager</i>	Michael Andrew Rodgers*
	<i>Assistant Stage Manager</i>	Crystal McCall

Cast:	<i>Coach Bryant</i>	Rodney Clark*
	<i>Young Bryan, Young Coach Bryant,</i>	Gregory Jones*
	<i>Uncle, Coach Cowan,</i>	
	<i>Coach Hank, Football Player,</i>	
	<i>Reporter, Television Announcer,</i>	
	<i>Technician, Attorney, Racist</i>	John Patrick Hayden*
	<i>Radio Announcer, Friend, Floor Manager, Grandpa,</i>	
	<i>Student Protestor</i>	Yaegel T. Welch*

Audience: **Recommended for ages 12+ due to some mild profanity.** All patrons must have a ticket, regardless of age. Children under the age of six are not admitted to the theatre.

Synopsis: A memory play about the life of Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant.

Setting: Arkansas, Texas, Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

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