

ASF *NEWS RELEASE*

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Alabama Shakespeare Festival Commissions Play About Legendary Football Coach Paul “Bear” Bryant

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONTGOMERY, AL (Friday May 9, 2008) The Alabama Shakespeare Festival has commissioned playwright and Chief Operating Officer Michael Vigilant to write a new play about the legendary University of Alabama football coach Paul “Bear” Bryant. The public will get a preview of this play called *Bear Country* on at 3:30 PM on May 16, when it is read as the kick-off event of the 2008 Southern Writers’ Project Festival of New Plays at ASF.

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.

Playwright Michael Vigilant 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.

Tickets to the reading of *Bear Country* on May 16 are just \$10. For more information on the Southern Writers’ Project Festival weekend and packages, call the ASF Box Office toll free at (800) 841-4ASF or go online at www.southernwritersproject.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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