

**TONY AWARD-WINNING DIRECTOR AND DRAMA INNOVATOR LLOYD RICHARDS,  
ONE OF THE PIONEERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN THEATRE,  
TO BE HONORED WITH 2002 DOROTHY AND LILLIAN GISH PRIZE  
Kate Burton, Charles S. Dutton and Other Luminaries of the Stage Will Pay Tribute**

One of the most revered pioneers of American theatre, Tony Award-winning director and Yale University professor emeritus LLOYD RICHARDS, will be presented with this year's **DOROTHY AND LILLIAN GISH PRIZE** for his part in shaping modern theater and guiding some of today's leading voices to the stage. Richards will receive the honor—a silver medallion and approximately \$200,000—at an awards ceremony to be held on October 30, 2002, at 6:30 P.M., at the Hudson Theatre, Millennium Broadway, New York City. Actors Kate Burton, Charles S. Dutton and other veterans of the stage will be on hand to pay tribute and deliver remarks. There will also be a series of short performances for the evening's celebrations. The annual Gish Prize is one of the largest awards in the arts honoring outstanding talents across disciplines.

In over 40 years of work, Richards has discovered and nurtured countless new playwrights, and staged some of the country's most significant stories, giving theatergoers an ever changing and challenging perspective on life. He was instrumental in the groundbreaking introduction of the African American voice to Broadway, making history in 1959 as the first black director of the first black drama by the first black woman playwright on the Great Way. Over the years he has continued to expand the African American experience on stage, working with talents like Sidney Poitier and August Wilson. Off stage, Richards made his mark by setting the standard for new play development with his staged readings at the National Playwrights Conference. At Yale, he brought his innovative techniques to drama education, experimenting and introducing his students to new plays and ideas. In 1993, Richards was recognized with the National Medal of Arts, the nation's highest honor for the arts.

One of the largest awards in the arts, the Gish Prize, now in its ninth year, recognizes outstanding talents from a spectrum of disciplines across the arts. Richards joins an assembly of talent who have been previously honored, including lighting designer Jennifer Tipton (2001), dancer/choreographer Merce Cunningham (2000), author/playwright Arthur Miller (1999), author Isabel Allende (1998), singer/songwriter Bob Dylan (1997), artist/director Robert Wilson (1996), film director Ingmar Bergman (1995), and architect Frank Gehry (1994).

The annual Gish Prize has no application process and is not determined through a competition. Recipients are chosen by a Gish Prize Selection Committee, a group that changes every year. Composed of leaders in the arts community, the committee for this year includes Ned Rifkin, director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden at the Smithsonian Institution, who serves as this year's committee chairman; Patricia Cruz, executive director of Aaron Davis Hall; Ming Cho Lee, Tony Award-winning scenic designer; Susana Leval, director of El Museo del Barrio; and composer Alvin Singleton.

“In my various associations with the Gish Prize, I have been deeply affected by Lillian Gish's line that she wished the Prize ‘be given to a man or woman who has made an outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind's enjoyment and understanding of life’,” said Mr. Richards, upon hearing of his selection. “That sentence has always affected me because that is so close to what I wanted my life to be about. That someone else has thought I am somewhere near fitting that description overwhelms me. I am pleased and I am proud.”

You might say that Lloyd Richards is qualified to interpret life, having experienced the best and worst of times with a lot of color and adventure in between. The sudden death of Richards' father when he was just nine, followed by the blindness of his mother, brought an early dose of hard times for Richards, who grew up during the Depression. Richards got used to hard work and decided to fly in the face of practical wisdom by abandoning law school at Wayne State University for a degree in theater. Starting out as a disc jockey, Richards has also been a waiter, a welfare caseworker, and in World War II, he became a Tuskegee airman at Alabama's flight training program for African American soldiers.

(more)

But Richards was determined to have a life in the theater. So when he was offered an audition in New York, young Richards packed up his bags and left Detroit for good, hoping to make his name in acting. But it was a challenging time for African American actors. Radio sponsors were hesitant about hiring black talent, and there were few good roles available on television or on stage. Richards dealt with the restrictive policies by taking acting jobs off-Broadway. He also worked increasingly behind the scenes, honing his skills as a director and drama teacher. Sidney Poitier, then a struggling actor, recognized Richards' talent. A few years later, when Poitier was cast in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, he asked Richards to be the director. The historic production opened up a new era on Broadway, and earned Richards a Tony Award nomination, the first of six. It was his Broadway directorial debut.

Over the years, Richards has put his stamp on the works of numerous playwrights from Shakespeare to Ibsen to O'Neill. But it is his uncanny ability to discover powerful new voices that may be his most lasting legacy.

"My whole career had been conditioned on the fact that there was no real log in the library of plays about the black experience in this country; they weren't there. Why? Because there weren't enough black playwrights," says Richards. "You had to start somewhere, and it had to start with material."

With this in mind, Richards spent over 30 years doing groundbreaking work in new play development at the National Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, where he served as artistic director from 1968 to 1999. He revamped the old process of accessing plays by stripping away all the elements of staging and production, and concentrating on the play itself in simple staged readings. Here, Richards discovered August Wilson and other leading voices in modern theater including Christopher Durang, John Guare, and Wendy Wasserstein. Wilson, who had been rejected five times before Richards selected him for the Conference, went on to win two Pulitzer Prizes. Richards has ushered six of Wilson's plays to Broadway, including *The Piano Lesson*, *Seven Guitars*, and *Fences*, for which he earned the coveted Tony Award for Best Direction in 1987.

Richards brought his innovative techniques to drama education when he became dean of the Yale School of Drama and artistic director of the Yale Repertory Theatre from 1979-1991. He offered students a taste of the real world by staging works of South African playwright Athol Fugard, Nobel laureates Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott, and new discoveries from the National Playwrights Conference. He also opened up the Repertory's stage to theater professionals like James Earl Jones, Jason Robards, Glenn Close, and Colleen Dewhurst. It continues to be his mission to mold a new generation of theater professionals.

"What the future will understand about your time and your culture and what you've contributed to it will be influenced by art. That is much more valuable than warships," says Richards. "The rest of the world may be affected by a bomb we drop on them, but their perception of our society will come through the arts."

Established in 1994 by the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize Trust and administered by JPMorgan Chase and Nathan Hale as trustees, the Prize is given annually to "a man or woman who has made an outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind's enjoyment and understanding of life." In her will, Lillian Gish stated: "It is my desire, by establishing this prize, to give recipients of the prize the recognition they deserve, to bring attention to their contributions to society and encourage others to follow in their path." Lillian Gish died in 1993 and Dorothy Gish, also an actress, died in 1968.

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**A Portrait of Lloyd Richards, Tony Award-winning Director and Yale University Professor Emeritus, is available digitally.**

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