

For Immediate Release June 29, 2022

# McCarter

THEATRE CENTER

**BULRUSHER**  
**ACCLAIMED PLAY BY**  
**EISA DAVIS**  
**Joins McCARTER'S**  
**2022-23 mainstage season in Princeton**

**Pulitzer-finalist was most recently produced**  
**By the celebrated BARD AT THE GATE digital theater series**



**BULRUSHER** by Eisa Davis - a Pulitzer Prize finalist for Drama in 2007 – will be produced by McCarter Theatre Center May 6-28, 2023 on the mainstage of the Roger S. Berlind Theater in Princeton, NJ. The production – with casting to be announced – will be directed by Nicole A. Watson, McCarter's Associate Artistic Director and joins the 2022-23 season [recently announced](#). Photos and assets: [LINK](#). Tickets and Info: [www.mccarter.org](http://www.mccarter.org).

**BULRUSHER** was a recent breakout “streaming” success, garnering wide attention during the height of the pandemic when the Tony-nominated (INDECENT, HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE) and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright (DRIVE) **Paula Vogel** launched the popular digital theater series [BARD AT THE GATE](#), now co-curated by **Ms. Vogel** and **Ms. Watson** in association with McCarter.

**BULRUSHER** is set in 1955 in the redwood country north of San Francisco, a multiracial girl grows up in a predominantly white town whose residents pepper their speech with the historical dialect of Boontling. Found floating in a basket on the river as an infant, Bulrusher is an orphan with a gift for clairvoyance that makes her feel like a stranger even around those who think they know her best: the taciturn schoolteacher who adopted her, the madam who runs her brothel with a fierce discipline, the logger with a zest for horses and women, and the guitar-slinging boy who is after Bulrusher's heart. Just when she thought her world might close in on her, she discovers an entirely new sense of self when a Black girl from Alabama comes to town.

The passionate, lyrical and humorous coming of age story had its world-premiere in NYC at Urban Stages in 2006 and was subsequently produced at Shotgun Players, Pillsbury House and Intiman Theatre, among others. BULRUSHER was a perfect fit for BARD AT THE GATE, created by Ms. Vogel to provide overlooked and underappreciated new American plays with a platform at what turned out to be the new dawn of digital theater when the pandemic shut down live productions for nearly two years.

To date, BARD AT THE GATE has presented eight new works that otherwise might have languished on unproduced script piles were it not for Ms. Vogel and BARD's advocacy. The series has emphasized a diverse offering of plays representing voices in the American theatrical canon such as women, BIPOC, LGBTQ and disabled artists. In fact, BULRUSHER is one of several productions receiving major productions – in theaters, live and in-person – subsequent to their debut on digital streams: LAST GASP by Split Britches, upcoming at La MaMa; FAT HAM, currently at The Public Theatre; and LESSONS IN SURVIVAL: 1971 at Vineyard Theatre.

BARD AT THE GATE continues to produce and stream readings of powerful plays - curated by **Paula Vogel**, **Nicole A. Watson** and the BARD [Advisory Council](#) comprised of top leaders in the theater industry; and plays filmed and edited by [Jared Mezzocchi](#).

## ABOUT BULRUSHER

*"The magic of Eisa Davis' BULRUSHER spellbinds on the stage as well as on the page, and was one of many reasons the play was a breakout success during seasons one - and two, by popular demand - of Bard at the Gate. It is especially thrilling now that Bard's partner, the McCarter, will stage it anew with extraordinary director Nicole A. Watson at the helm. Our goal with Bard is to bring new life to neglected works, and BULRUSHER is a prime example of our dream realized. Theater-goers who crave lyrical, refreshing and challenging plays will not want to miss it." - Paula Vogel (Tony Nominee, and Pulitzer Prize winning playwright – and Founder of BARD at the GATE.)*

*"I am thrilled to direct BULRUSHER and share Eisa's artistry with McCarter audiences. I have admired Eisa's work as a writer and performer for such a long time and this play is a joyful, refreshing, and powerful story for audiences of all ages. I love that it features a young woman of color who even in the midst of uncertainty is certain about following her own heart and dreams. – Nicole A. Watson (Director, BULRUSHER; McCarter Associate Artistic Director; BARD AT THE GATE, co-curator.)*

*"As playwright Eisa Davis says, 'BULRUSHER has a timeless, vintage quality to it that speaks to the current moment - in the midst of an urgent call for equality and repair - a movement that has been going on for centuries.' This play is at the very heart of what BARD at the Gate is about and it reinforces the special nature of McCarter's partnership with Paula Vogel. We couldn't be more excited to produce this play on our mainstage and share it with audiences." - Sarah Rasmussen (McCarter Artistic Director)*

Tickets on Sale Now at [www.mccarter.org](http://www.mccarter.org).

**Produced by special arrangement with Cody Lassen & Larry Hirschhorn.**

## **BIOS:**

**EISA DAVIS** (Playwright) is a writer, composer, and performer. A recipient of a 2020 Creative Capital Award, a Herb Alpert Awardee in Theater and an Obie winner for Sustained Excellence in Performance, Eisa was a Pulitzer Prize finalist for her play *Bulrusher*, and wrote and starred in the stage memoir *Angela's Mixtape*. Other plays include *Paper Armor*, *Umkovu*, *Six Minutes*, *The History Of Light* (Barrymore nomination), *Warriors Don't Cry*, *Ramp* (Ruby Prize), *Mushroom* (premiering September 2022) and *||: Girls :||: Chance :||: Music :||:*. A multivolume series of her plays is soon to be published by 53rd State Press. Eisa led the 2021 citywide celebration of Kathleen Collins' work *AFROFEMONONOMY // WORK THE ROOTS*, has recorded two albums of her original music, *Something Else* and *Tinctures*, and has enjoyed a multi-decade career as a performer on stage and screen. Current projects include her music-theatre piece *The Essentialisn't*, and the songs for a musical version of *Devil In A Blue Dress*. An alumna of New Dramatists, Eisa has received awards and fellowships from the Hermitage Artist Retreat, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Helen Merrill Foundation, the Van Lier and Mellon Foundations, and Cave Canem. Eisa was born in Berkeley, CA and lives in Brooklyn, NY.

**NICOLE A. WATSON** (Director) is the HGB Bold Associate Artistic Director at the McCarter Theatre Center. Prior to this appointment, she served as the AAD at Round House Theatre. On behalf of both theaters, she produced the Adrienne Kennedy Festival, directing a digital version of Kennedy's *She Brought Her Heart Back in a Box*. Select credits include: *Passing*, (McCarter/Bard at the Gate) *School Girls*; or, *The African Mean Girls Play* (Helen Hayes winner Best Ensemble, and Best Supporting Artist). The world premieres of *A Wind in the Door*, (The Kennedy Center) *The West End* (Cincinnati Playhouse) *it's not a trip it's a journey* (Round House) In addition to her work as an arts leader and advocate, Nicole continues to work as a freelance director and educator. A former history teacher, Nicole started directing in 2008 and has worked at theaters and universities across the country, championing new plays and playwrights, especially female playwrights of color. She has worked with New Dramatists, the Lark Play Development Center, the Fire this Time Festival, the New Black Fest, the Women's Project Theater, The 52nd Street Project, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, The Guthrie, Portland Center Stage, Baltimore Center Stage, Signature Theater, Playmakers Repertory Theatre, Center, A.C.T., Asolo Rep, Washington National Opera, Theater Latte Da, The Playwrights Center, The Kennedy Center, The Contemporary American Theater Festival, Working Theater, Smith College, UNCSCA, NYU, and LIU. She is a New Georges Affiliated Artist and an alum of the Drama League, the Lincoln Center Directors Lab and the Women's Project Directors Lab and a member of the SDC. BA: History, Yale. MA: NYU Gallatin School of Individualized Study. <http://www.nicoleawatson.com/>

**PAULA VOGEL** is a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright whose plays include *How I Learned to Drive* (Tony Award nomination for Best Revival of a Play, Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the Lortel Prize, OBIE Award, two Drama Desk Awards, Outer Critics Circle and New York Drama Critics Awards for Best Play), *Indecent* (Tony Award nomination for Best Play), *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, *The Mineola Twins*, *The Baltimore Waltz*, *Hot'n'Thrbbing*, *Desdemona*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, *The Oldest Profession* and *A Civil War Christmas*. In 2020, she founded of the digital theatre series *Bard at the Gate*. Upcoming projects include *The Mother Play*; an adaptation of *They Shoot Horses Don't They*, co-directed by Marianne Elliott and Steven Hoggett; a memoir; and a book on playwriting. Awards include a Pulitzer Prize, a Tony nomination, the American Theatre Hall of Fame Award, two Obies, the Lily Award, the NY Drama Critics Circle Award, a Guggenheim and a Pew Charitable Trust Award. She founded and ran the MFA playwriting program at Brown University and served as the O'Neill Chair of Playwriting at Yale School of Drama. She is member of the Dramatists Guild and is honored by awards given in her name by The American College Theater Festival and the Vineyard Theatre. <http://paulavogelplaywright.com>

**BARD AT THE GATE** – with its third season soon to be announced – is led by Executive Producer and co-curator Paula Vogel; producer Rosey Strub; Associate producers BJ Evans and Ryan Pointer. The series is produced in conjunction with the renowned McCarter Theater Center in Princeton, NJ; Sarah Rasmussen, Artistic Director; Michael S. Rosenberg, Managing Director. Nicole A. Watson is co-curator. Digital filming and editing by Virtual Design Collective (ViDCo). Creative direction by Jared Mezzocchi. Milan Eldridge is Stage Manager. BARD AT THE GATE is sponsored by its Vanguard Circle: Roz and Jerry Meyer, Sallie B. Goodman Fund, Daryl Roth, Elizabeth Armstrong, Larry Hirschhorn and Melissa Posen.

**McCARTER** An independent not-for-profit performing arts center located between New York City and Philadelphia – and on the campus of Princeton University – McCarter is a multi-disciplinary creative and intellectual hub offering theater, music, dance, spoken word, and educational programs for all ages that inspires conversations, connections and collaborations in our communities. We lead with our values of justice and joy, and we seek beauty in belonging. Celebrated for developing new work and winner of the 1994 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, world premieres include Christopher Durang's *Vanya, Sonia, Masha and Spike* (Tony, Best Play), Tarell Alvin McCraney's *The Brother/Sister Plays*, Emily Mann's *Having Our Say*. Renowned artists who have appeared at McCarter include: Alvin Ailey, Yo-Yo Ma, Audra McDonald, David Sedaris, *The Moth*, Terence Blanchard, Rosanne Cash, *Lake Street Dive*, Shawn Colvin, and more. McCarter connects with the community year-round with digital programming, on-site classes and in-school residencies. McCarter and Princeton University share a long history of unique partnerships and creative collaborations. [www.mccarter.org](http://www.mccarter.org). The Upcoming 22/23 **Season Trailer** is [here](#).

*(Pictured: Playwright Eisa Davis, Director Nicole A. Watson, Paula Vogel)*

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