

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Robert Saxon, 404.733.4710, robert.saxon@woodruffcenter.org
Marci Tate, 404.733.4713, marci.tate@woodruffcenter.org

Date: December 19, 2007

Alliance Theatre Fosters Local Playwrights with Innovative Program

ATLANTA — The Alliance Theatre Atlanta Writers Lab, a program now in its first year, provides a home for local writers before, after and during development of their work for the Alliance. The Lab was developed to give the Alliance artistic staff a chance to develop these writers for the Atlanta theater community, establish connections with them before their scripts are ready for production at the Alliance, and reach out to those writers who may not yet write for the stage but are interested in exploring writing for the theater.

Four writers were chosen to be in residence as members of the program for the 2007-08 season: **Suehyla El-Attar, Isma'il ibn Conner, Janece Shaffer and Ken Weitzman.** (Bios are below.) These members attend monthly meetings as a group, have access to the Alliance's artistic staff, offices and equipment/supplies, receive free tickets to the season's shows, and participate in "think tank" activities outside of monthly meetings. The Alliance also has the right of first refusal for projects originated as part of the residency.

Working with the Alliance's literary department, each writer chooses the content of two Lab meetings. Content can include readings and discussion of a writer's work, inviting outside guests to discuss a topic chosen by the writer, or addressing issues of professional development.

2007-08 season meetings have featured a lecture and reading from Bernard-Marie Koltès' work by Conner (October); a reading and discussion of Weitzman's work-in-progress *Fires in the Garden* (November); and a new play idea shared with the Lab by

El-Attar (December).

Each writer will also curate a “think tank” activity designed to have a lasting impact at the Alliance. This can include facilitating conversations, inviting guest speakers, or organizing an event or another enriching activity that brings together the theater and the writer’s creative

Writers Lab, 2-2-2

abilities. Think tanks planned for the spring will include an audience development brainstorming session led by Shaffer.

Additional Information:

Participation: Lab participation is by invitation only and continues for a single season. Invitations are extended the summer before the season begins. Writers can be members for more than one year but not for two consecutive years.

Eligibility: Writers must be based primarily in the metro Atlanta region during their season of membership.

Program Size: 4-5 writers

Meetings: The Lab meets once a month from September through May.

Compensation: Writers are not compensated for the Lab residency, however the Alliance supports any script copying costs or actor compensation associated with the Lab.

Writer Bios:

Suehyla El-Attar was born in Starkville, Mississippi to devout Muslim parents originally from Cairo, Egypt. In 1998, Suehyla moved to Atlanta to further her career in radio and theatre. Eventually, after working on-air with Z93, Q100 and 99X, she left radio altogether to completely focus on the stage. Since that decision in 2004, Suehyla has been on the stages of PushPush Theater, Essential Theatre Company, Dad’s Garage, Theatre in the Square, Alliance Theatre, Synchronicity Performance Group and, most recently, Horizon

Theatre's production of *9 Parts of Desire*. In addition to her on-stage credits, Suehyla wrote *The Perfect Prayer*, which had its World Premiere in Atlanta at Horizon Theatre in June 2006. Most recently (May 2007), she enjoyed its West Coast premiere at Cyranos Theatre in Anchorage, Alaska.

Isma`il ibn Conner was last seen performing a staged reading of his translation, *In the Solitude of Cotton Fields*, by Bernard-Marie Koltès at the 2007 TCG Conference for the Global Tapas program in Minneapolis, Minn. Other projects include *Black Battles With Dogs* at the prestigious Festival d'Avignon in Avignon, France and the Hellenic Festival in Athens, Greece. *BBWD* debuted at 7 Stages in 2001 and subsequently toured France (Lorient, Paris and Clermont-Ferrand). *BBWD* was in Chicago for the Playing French Festival at the Athenaeum. Isma'il is currently working on *The Koltès Project* (in co-operation with the Koltès Estate), a ten-year, six-play project involving the works of Bernard-Marie Koltès. This ambitious project includes translations of six plays, publication of the translations, university residencies, symposiums and panels. It will premiere at 7 Stages, tour France and Africa, then tour of American cities. Isma'il is an Artistic Associate with 7 Stages Theatre and creator of 7 Stages' resident artist ensemble Group 7 (G7).

Ken Weitzman's most recent play, *The As If Body Loop*, was produced as part of the 2007 Humana Festival of New American Plays at the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Ken will return to

Writers Lab, 3-3-3

Humana in 2008, commissioned to write several short plays for the Humana Anthology Project. Ken's previous plays have been produced or developed at Atlantic Theater Company, New York Stage and Film, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Playwrights Horizons, Arena Stage, the Mark Taper Forum, Williamstown Theatre Festival, Dad's Garage, Florida Stage, the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Black Dahlia Theatre, Page 73 Productions and the Summer Play Festival. Ken has received commissions from Arena Stage, South Coast Repertory, Alliance Theatre and Actors Theatre of Louisville. Awards include the 2003 L. Arnold Weissberger Award for Arrangements (which was subsequently chosen to be produced as part of Atlantic Theater Company's inaugural second stage season); the McDonald Playwriting Award for *The As If Body Loop* (for the best new play in San Diego, chosen by KPBS); and the Elizabeth George Commission for an Outstanding Emerging Playwright (chosen and awarded by South Coast Repertory Theatre). Ken received his M.F.A. from the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and has taught playwriting at Emory University, UCSD, West Georgia University, The Old Globe Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Actor's Express, Horizon Theatre, Alliance Theatre, the Playwrights Project and Young Playwrights, Inc. (where he was Education and Literary Director). Previously Ken wrote and produced sports documentaries and narratives for the National Basketball Association Entertainment, Speedvision, Emerald City and CybrCard.

Janece Shaffer's credits include: *Hula-Hoopin' Hannah and Her Hanukkah Adventure* (commissioned by the Jewish Theatre of the South, December 2003), *Wishful Thinking* (Horizon Theatre, June 2003, honored with a nomination for the American Theatre Critic Association's New Play Award), *The Genes of Beauty Queens* (Horizon Theatre, 2001), *He Looks Great in a Hat* (Alliance Theatre Company, 1999) and *All on the Bus* (Aurora Theatre, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004). A native of Atlanta, Shaffer has also penned shorter works for Actor's Express and PushPush Theater. She resides with her husband Bill and

her children, Emma and Bill, in Decatur.

#

Now in its 39th season, Atlanta's nationally acclaimed Alliance Theatre, **recipient of the 2007 Regional Theatre Tony Award®**, is the leading professional resident theatre of the Southeast, creating the powerful experience of shared theatre for diverse people on two stages for youth and adult audiences. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Susan V. Booth and Managing Director Thomas Pechar, the Alliance Theatre is **a national theatre with a local address**, reaching out annually to almost 200,000 patrons and members of the community. Known for its high artistic standards and national role in creating significant theatrical works, the Alliance launched three Tony Award-winning hits to Broadway: Alice Walker's ***The Color Purple***, Elton John and Tim Rice's ***Aida*** and Alfred Uhry's ***The Last Night of Ballyhoo***. And, in a rare event for a regional theatre, it originated the national tour of the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical ***The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee***. The theatre has premiered 50 works including adaptations of Carson McCullers' ***The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*** and Pearl Cleage's ***Blues for an Alabama Sky***. Further evidence of the Alliance's commitment to new work is found in its nationally recognized Kendeda Graduate Playwriting Competition, a cutting-edge program introducing student playwrights to professional networks while producing the world premiere of the winning student's work. The Alliance Theatre also offers extensive education and outreach programs such as the Institute for Educators and the Collision Project for high school students. The Alliance continuously brings Atlanta the finest talent and finest art—proving once again that the Alliance is where great theatre lives. 404.733.4650 or www.alliancetheatre.org

The Alliance Theatre is a division of the Woodruff Arts Center in Atlanta, Georgia, which also includes the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, High Museum of Art, Young Audiences and the 14th Street Playhouse.

PAGE