



For more information, contact:  
Dr. Sheryl Kennedy Haydel  
shaydel@dillard.edu :: 504-816-4024

**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**The Dillard University Theatre Program Presents Two Plays from  
The Harlem Renaissance by Willis Richardson**

**THE BROKEN BANJO & THE CHIP WOMAN'S FORTUNE  
PLUS TWO AFRICAN MYTHS**

- Who:** Dillard University Theatre Program
- What:** The Dillard Theatre Program, in its 83<sup>rd</sup> season, will perform two plays from the Harlem Renaissance by Willis Richardson – a pioneer of African-American drama.
- When:** March 9-10 at 8:00 p.m. and March 11 at 3:00 p.m.
- Where:** Samuel DuBois Cook Fine Arts and Communications Center, 2601 Gentilly Blvd., New Orleans, LA
- Cost:** \$15 – general admission; \$10 – seniors, faculty and staff; and \$5 – students w/ID. Tickets are available at the Cook Theatre Box Office.

*The play is directed by Ray Vrazel, an assistant professor of Theatre at Dillard University.*

**Background**

During the 1920s and 1930s, Willis Richardson (1889-1977), was highly respected as a leading African-American playwright and drama anthologist. His plays were performed by numerous black high school, college, and university drama groups and by theatre companies in Chicago, New York, Washington, D.C., Cleveland, Baltimore and Atlanta.

With the opening of *The Chip Woman's Fortune* (1923), he became the first African American to have a play produced on Broadway. Several of his 46 plays were published in assorted magazines, and in his essays, he urged black Americans to seek their dramatic material in their own lives and circumstances. In addition, he edited three anthologies of plays by African-Americans. But between 1940 and his death in 1977, Richardson came to realize that his plays were period pieces and that they no longer reflected the problems and situations of African-Americans.

Nevertheless, in his later years, he attempted unsuccessfully to preserve several of his plays through publication. Considered the father of African-American drama and the hope and promise of African-American drama, died in obscurity. Until recently, Richardson's work has been neglected by scholarly study. But his contribution played a pioneering role in American theater.

In the 1920s, the period during which he was most productive, Richardson redirected the nature of African-American drama. In his essay, "The Hope of a Negro Drama", the first of six essays on the theatre, Richardson criticized plays written by blacks for white audiences. He wrote that they showed "the manner in which Negroes are treated by white people in the United States." Richardson believed, instead, that plays written by African-Americans should focus on the black community and not on racial tensions and differences. He sought to utilize drama as a means of educating African-American audiences.

Richardson asserted that most of his plays would be drawn from the folk tradition, and that they would center on conflicts within the black community. In exploring the African-American community as a central theme in his plays, Richardson typically focuses on the consequences of refusals by blacks to help one another. For more information, please call theatre box office 504-816-4857.

### **About Dillard University Theatre Program**

The Theatre Program's mission is to provide rigorous, professional training in a liberal arts context for future actors, directors, designers, managers, teachers, scholars and related theatre practitioners. The program is committed to the aesthetics of Black theatre, creating a globally aware artist while identifying, sharing and perpetuating the highest standards possible.

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*Dillard University, located at 2601 Gentilly Blvd. in New Orleans, Louisiana, is a private four-year liberal arts historically black institution that was founded in 1869. The University's signature programs include Physics and Film. For more information, please visit [www.dillard.edu](http://www.dillard.edu) and follow us on Twitter, Facebook @DU1869 and Instagram: Dillard University.*