

ACTOR/PRODUCER/AUTHORS RUBY DEE AND THE LATE OSSIE DAVIS TO BE HONORED AS SEVENTH RECIPIENTS OF PHILADELPHIA'S MARIAN ANDERSON AWARD

Star-Studded Gala Performance featuring The Philadelphia Orchestra and special guest artists planned for Monday, October 24, 2005 at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts

Philadelphia, July 25, 2005 – Mayor John Street announced today that Ruby Dee and the late Ossie Davis will be honored with this year's Marian Anderson Award. A Gala Performance in tribute to the legendary couple whose dual careers as artists and activists helped champion and shape the civil rights movement, will take place on October 24, 2005 at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts.

In making the announcement Mayor Street said, "I applaud the Marian Anderson Award Selection Panel for identifying two outstanding individuals, Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis, as they exemplify the power of the artist to change the world. They were among the most vocal Americans in support of the early days of the civil rights movement. They used the power of their roles as critically acclaimed artists to affect change in society - in areas where change was most needed."

In responding to the Selection Panel's invitation to accept the Award, Ruby Dee noted that, "Before Ossie and I ever met each other, Marian Anderson was a presence in both our lives. In a very fundamental way, she planted the seeds of victory in us. Witnessing her triumphs, we came to believe that we could triumph, too. She helped shape our dreams, gave substance to hope. So receiving this award is a very special kind of validation for me."

"The Marian Anderson Award is one of the bright jewels in Philadelphia's cultural crown, and we're proud to play a leadership role in its on-going success," said Hugh Long, State CEO for Wachovia in Pennsylvania and Delaware. "This award has enriched an already vibrant arts community and has added immeasurably to the visibility and prestige we now enjoy in this region."

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The Marian Anderson Award Gala Performance honoring Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis, a co-production of the Marian Anderson Award and The Philadelphia Orchestra, will be taped for broadcast on WPVI-TV 6 ABC. It will feature the world-renowned *Philadelphia Orchestra* performing with legendary soprano, *Jessye Norman*, who will appear as principal classical guest and Harry Belafonte will serve as the principal Tribute speaker.

Grammy Award winning song-stylist extraordinaire *Nancy Wilson* will perform as principal contemporary music artist. Tony Award winning actress *Phylicia Rashad* will represent the theatre community, and critically acclaimed poet *Sonia Sanchez* will represent the literary community, appearing in a special performance with the groundbreaking *a capella* singing group *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, recently documented on the "American Masters" series on PBS. Other tribute participants will be announced later this summer.

The 56-year personal, artistic, and humanitarian partnership of Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis stands as a great marriage of talent coupled with a shared commitment to a better world.

Over the years, singly and together, they received numerous honors as performers and activists. Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee were voted into the NAACP Image Award Hall of Fame together in 1989, awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1995, received the Screen Actors Guild Lifetime Achievement Award for their career and humanitarian achievements in 2001, and in 2004 they received one of this country's most prestigious artistic accolades – the Kennedy Center Honors.

Actor, writer, producer, activist Ossie Davis, who died in February of this year, was frequently at the forefront of events that marked large public and positive changes for African-Americans throughout the second half of the 20th century. He was an emcee at the 1963 March on Washington and delivered the eulogy for Malcolm X.

In his joint autobiography with Ms. Dee, *With Ossie & Ruby: In This Life Together*, Mr. Davis noted the special impact that Marian Anderson had upon him and his career beginning with her Easter Sunday concert in 1939: “I remember most that voice, that indescribable voice that held seventy-five thousand people in its arms and rocked us like a baby. It inspired us, calmed our fears, and carried us up to the mountaintop...It was for me an act of definition as well as defiance, with its own salute to the black Struggle. It married in my mind forever the performing arts as a weapon in the struggle for freedom. It made a connection that, for me and for thousands of other artists, has never been severed. It was a proclamation and a commitment. I have been in love with Marian Anderson ever since.” That blend of art and activism, apparent in all his work, shone most particularly in his writings -- “For Us The Living,” an award-winning teleplay based on the life of Medgar Evers; *Escape to Freedom*, a children's play about Frederick Douglass, which the American Library Association honored with the Coretta Scott King Award; *Just Like Martin*, a children's novel set in Alabama during the civil rights era, and Mr. Davis' best-known work, the anti-segregation satire, *Purlie Victorious*, which debuted on Broadway in 1961.

A full partner in their shared commitment to activism, Ruby Dee is passionate about her vision for change. As a child, she walked the picket lines with her mother, protesting job discrimination on

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Harlem's 125th Street; since that time, she has been involved with many causes and organizations, including the NAACP and the National Council of Negro Women. In 1970, she along with her husband was honored with the New York Urban League's Frederick Douglass Award.

Her early career on stage and screen catapulted her to the public eye and critical success due to an extraordinary combination of talent and beauty about which she was never over-awed, “the kind of beauty I want most is the hard-to-get kind that comes from within -- strength, courage, dignity.” Those qualities she has found in abundance in all the work she has chosen throughout her career. In recognition of her acting, she has received an Obie, two Drama Desk Awards, and an Emmy Award. She was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame in 1988. Ms. Dee has also adapted several works for the stage (including her own book of poetry and short stories, *My One Good Nerve*), and has written a full-length original musical,

Take It From the Top. She is also the author of two children's books, *Tower to Heaven* and Literary Guild Award-winner *Two Ways to Count to Ten*.

In making the Award announcement board chairman Pamela A. Crawley noted that, "Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis are towering figures in American life, both as outstanding artists and as civic role models for all Americans. Their shared commitment to excellence and deep belief in the power of the arts to change our society for the better, has ensured that succeeding generations of artists and film-making professionals have more opportunity. They established a standard of critical excellence to strive for that is inspiring and we are honored to celebrate Miss Dee and the late, and certainly very great, Ossie Davis with this year's Marian Anderson Award." Crawley went on to thank Wachovia, the Award sponsor, Mayor John F. Street and the City of Philadelphia and other lead sponsors, including WPVI TV-6 ABC, KB Consultants, PECO, American Airlines, the Official Airline of the Marian Anderson Award and Sofitel Philadelphia for serving as the Official Hotel Sponsor again this year. She also gave special thanks to Governor Rendell and the Commonwealth for providing support to the 2005 Award.



The Marian Anderson Award honors artists whose leadership on behalf of a humanitarian cause(s) or issues has benefited society. Created in 1998, the Award named for the great Philadelphian and American artist Marian Anderson, is produced and administered by the Philadelphia Festival of the Arts, Inc. under the direction of J. Patrick Moran. Since inception, the Award program has provided more than \$400,000 in free public programs, residencies, commissions and grants to young artists. This year's Gala Performance will be preceded by the annual Gala Dinner, also at the Kimmel Center. Those interested in attending the Gala Dinner which includes a premium ticket to the event can call the Marian Anderson Award office at 215 683-2094 to receive an invitation. Single tickets for the Gala Performance go on sale August 1, 2005 and are available by calling Ticket Philadelphia at 215-893-1999 or by visiting The Philadelphia Orchestra website at www.philorch.org. The first recipient of the Marian Anderson Award in 1998 was Harry Belafonte, followed by the late Gregory Peck in 1999, Dame Elizabeth Taylor in 2000, Quincy Jones in 2001, Danny Glover in 2002, and Oprah Winfrey received the Award in 2003, the Gala of which was broadcast as a prime-time special on WPVI TV-6 ABC.

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