



San Francisco Jazz Organization  
Three Embarcadero Center  
Lobby Level  
San Francisco, CA 94111

T 415-398-5655  
F 415-398-5569  
mailto:sfjazz.org  
sfjazz.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **SFJAZZ APPOINTS ISHMAEL REED** **FIRST SFJAZZ POET LAUREATE**

(San Francisco, CA, February 28, 2012) – SFJAZZ, the leading nonprofit jazz organization on the West Coast, the presenter of the SFJAZZ Spring Season 2012 running now through June 22, and the San Francisco Jazz Festival, today announced the appointment of Ishmael Reed as the first SFJAZZ Poet Laureate. This appointment will serve to expand and promote the role of poetry and spoken word in jazz and to continue celebrating jazz as a living art form built on a constantly evolving tradition.

The mission of SFJAZZ is to reach, develop and nurture current and future musicians and audiences by providing rich, innovative, interactive and informative programming in jazz appreciation, creation and performance. The SFJAZZ Poet Laureate will be an integral part of this mission. The Poet Laureate will work with the SFJAZZ Education Department to encourage poets and celebrate poetry within the Jazz in the Middle program and Discover Jazz education series.

The announcement comes as SFJAZZ is constructing the new SFJAZZ Center, the West Coast's first stand-alone building dedicated to jazz. The Center, designed by award-winning architect Mark Cavagnero, will open on MLK Day, January 2013. Located at Franklin and Fell Streets in San Francisco's vibrant Hayes Valley, the SFJAZZ Center will be a hub of art, music, culture and community and will take its place alongside major arts institutions such as the San Francisco Symphony, Opera and Ballet in the Civic Center performing arts district.

SFJAZZ Trustee and acclaimed author Robert Mailer Anderson says, "It is wonderful to already hear the call and response of Jazz emanating from our new cultural center. It has been such an inspirational art form to poets, painters, photographers, politicians and intellectuals. With the SFJAZZ Center, we are going to make clear that cross-pollination. And aside from music, see what else grows."

Ishmael Reed says, "I am honored to be named the first SFJAZZ Poet Laureate and I am very excited about the future SFJAZZ Center. Jazz has given so much to me; maybe now I can give something back."

"Among American writers, Ishmael Reed is probably the one whose sensibility is closest to jazz. His tone is colloquial; his ideas are improvisational yet rooted in down-home wisdom," *The New York Times* declared. Reed is known for his

satirical works challenging American political culture, and highlighting political and cultural oppression. Currently Writer-In-Residence at the California College of the Arts, Reed retired in 2005 from teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, where he taught for thirty-five years. He currently lives in Oakland, California. Two of his books have been nominated for National Book Awards, and a book of poetry, *Conjure*, was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. His *New and Collected Poems, 1964–2007*, received the Commonwealth Club of California's Gold Medal. His poem, "When I Die I Will Go To Jazz," is the theme for the 2012 SFJAZZ Gala and an inspiration for the Center's development.

Most recently, LitQuake, the annual San Francisco Literary Festival, honored Ishmael Reed with their 2011 Barbary Coast Award. Among Ishmael Reed's other honors are writing fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts. In 1995, he received the Langston Hughes Medal, awarded by City College of New York; in 1997, the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Award, establishing a 3-year collaboration with the Oakland based Second Start Literacy Project in 1998. In 1998, he also received a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship award. In 1999, he received a Fred Cody Award from the Bay Area Book Reviewers Association, and was inducted into Chicago State University's National Literary Hall of Fame of Writers of African Descent. Other awards include a Rene Castillo OTTO Award for Political Theatre (2002); a Phillis Wheatley Award from the Harlem Book Fair (2003); and in 2004, a Robert Kirsch Award, a Los Angeles Times Book Prize, besides the D.C. Area Writing Project's 2nd Annual Exemplary Writer's Award and the Martin Millennial Writers, Inc. Contribution to Southern Arts Award, in Memphis, Tennessee. A 1972 manifesto inspired a major visual art exhibit, *NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith*, curated by Franklin Sirmans for The Menil Collection in Houston, where it opened June 27, 2008, and subsequently traveled to P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in New York City, and the Miami Art Museum through 2009.

Ishmael Reed's texts and lyrics have been performed, composed or set to music by Albert Ayler, David Murray, Allen Toussaint, Carman Moore, Taj Mahal, Olu Dara, Lester Bowie, Carla Bley, Steve Swallow, Ravi Coltrane, Leo Nocentelli, Eddie Harris, Anthony Cox, Don Pullen, Billie Bang, Bobby Womack, Milton Cardonna, Omar Sosa, Fernando Saunders, Yosvany Terry, Jack Bruce, Little Jimmy Scott, Robert Jason, Alvin "Youngblood" Hart, Mary Wilson of the Supremes, Cassandra Wilson and others.

#### **ABOUT SFJAZZ**

SFJAZZ, founded in 1983, is the largest nonprofit presenter of jazz in the western United States. SFJAZZ presents over 100 concerts a year to over 100,000 fans and is dedicated to advancing the art form of jazz and cultivating new jazz audiences through artistic and educational programming, including: The San Francisco Jazz Festival, SFJAZZ Spring Season, SFJAZZ Collective, SFJAZZ Summerfest, SFJAZZ Education, SFJAZZ Membership and SFJAZZ Hotplate.

Media Contact: Marshall Lamm, [marshall@sfjazz.org](mailto:marshall@sfjazz.org), (510) 928-1410.

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