

American Academy of Arts and Letters

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NEWS RELEASE

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NEW MUSICAL WINS 2012 COMPETITION *WITNESS UGANDA*

New York, February 8, 2012 – The winner of the 2012 Richard Rodgers Awards for Musical Theater was announced today by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which administers the Rodgers Awards.

Witness Uganda by Matt Gould and Griffin Matthews

Uganda, 2005:

Griffin, a black American volunteer, arrives from New York City to help build a village school and escape his church's probing into his sexuality. But when he falls into a complicated relationship with a group of destitute, orphaned teenagers, he becomes obsessed with a mission that will change his and their lives forever. From the beautiful rolling hills of the Ugandan countryside to a stifling apartment in New York City, from a joyous celebration of African youth to a terrifying abduction 8000 miles away, *Witness Uganda* documents the story of a man battling to find his place in a world full of injustice and inhumanity and explores the question "is changing the world even possible?"



Photo credit: Diana King

Matt Gould and Griffin Matthews, writers and composers of *Witness Uganda*.

Witness Uganda was awarded a staged reading.

The intent of the Richard Rodgers Award is to nurture talented composers and playwrights by enabling their musicals to be produced in New York City. Former award recipients include Maury Yeston, *Nine*; Jonathan Larson, *Rent*; Julie Taymor and Elliot Goldenthal, *Juan Darien*; Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty, *Lucky Stiff*; Jeanine Tesori and Brian Crawley, *Violet*; and Scott Frankel, Michael Korie, and Doug Wright, *Grey Gardens*. Since 1980 seventy works have received Rodgers awards.

This year's jury included Stephen Sondheim (chair), John Guare, Sheldon Harnick, David Ives, Richard Maltby, Jr., Jeanine Tesori, and John Weidman.

Richard Rodgers, elected to the Academy in 1955, endowed these awards in 1978. The awards provide financial support for productions, studio productions, and staged readings of original musicals, by nonprofit theaters in New York City. The Richard Rodgers Awards are the Academy's only awards for which applications are accepted. **Application forms for the Richard Rodgers Awards may be downloaded from www.artsandletters.org.**

BIOGRAPHIES

Matt Gould's *Witness Uganda* (co-written with Griffin Matthews) is the recipient of ASCAP's Dean Kay Award and Harold Adamson Award and has received a Disney/ASCAP workshop with Stephen Schwartz and a workshop at the Vineyard Arts Project. Matt is also working on a commission for Yale Rep with playwright Carson Kreitzer on a new musical called *Lempicka*. He wrote and directed *Free Style* for LA's REPRISE Theatre Company (commissioned by Jason Alexander), wrote *Twilight in Manhego* (Jonathan Larson Foundation Award) in the NYMF, was commissioned by Playwrights Horizons to write music for Lucy Thurber's *Dillingham City*, composed music for *Dreyfus In Rehearsal* (Theatre Row) and translated, adapted and directed *Romeo and Juliet in Pulaar* (Mauritania, West Africa). He was a composing fellow in New Dramatist's Composer/Librettist studio and has composed and arranged music for Grammy Winner Desmond Child, Terrence McNally, and Vanessa Williams. His music has been performed at Jazz at Lincoln Center, The Saban Theatre (LA), Symphony Space (NYC), Joe's Pub, New World Stages, Huntington Theatre Company (Boston), Rattlestick (NYC), Summit Series, and with Griffin Matthews this March, *TEDx* Wall Street!

Griffin Matthews graduated with a BFA in musical theater from Carnegie Mellon University, in his hometown of Pittsburgh, PA. He is a writer, director, actor, and philanthropist who splits his time between New York and Los Angeles. He co-wrote (*book, music, and lyrics*) and directed numerous staged readings of *Witness Uganda* (Harold Adamson Award/Dean Kay Award), a musical based on the formation of his grassroots non-profit organization: Uganda Project. *Witness Uganda* was invited to perform at Vineyard Arts Project/Art Farm (*New Writers. New Plays*), Rattlestick Theater (*F*!@cking Good Plays Festival*), and *The ASCAP Foundation/Disney Musical Theatre Workshop* hosted by Stephen Schwartz. He directed a reading of *Lempicka* for Yale Rep and New Dramatists. He and Matt Gould are honored to have been asked to perform selections from *Witness Uganda* at this year's *TEDx* conference in New York City. As an actor, he has appeared on *The Mentalist*, *Suburgatory*, *Weeds*, *Torchwood*, *90210*, *Law & Order LA*, *Cashmere Mafia*, numerous commercials, and has hosted several web series, and appeared Off-Broadway and regionally. His greatest accomplishment continues to be watching the students of Uganda Project rise above their circumstances and be the first members of their families to graduate high school and college! Resurrect People!

WitnessUganda.com

The American Academy of Arts and Letters was established in 1898 to “foster, assist, and sustain an interest in literature, music, and the fine arts.” Election to the Academy is considered the highest formal recognition of artistic merit in this country. The Academy is currently comprised of 250 of America's leading voices in the fields of Art, Architecture, Literature, and Music. The Academy presents exhibitions of art, architecture, and manuscripts; and readings and performances of new musicals throughout the year, and is located in three landmark buildings designed by McKim, Mead & White, Cass Gilbert, and Charles Pratt Huntington on Audubon Terrace at 155 Street and Broadway, New York City.