



1901 Ashby Avenue, Berkeley California 94703  
TEL 510.841.6500 FAX 510.841.7468  
E-MAIL info@shotgunplayers.org  
www.shotgunplayers.org

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SHOTGUN PLAYERS PRESENT

# *Bulrusher*

BY EISA DAVIS

CO-DIRECTED BY MARGO HALL & ELLEN SEBASTIAN CHANG

**BERKELEY**— Time: 1955. Place: Boonville, California. Outcast for her clairvoyance and her lack of family, *Bulrusher* finds out how much she doesn't know when she falls for a stranger from Alabama. But will this visitor open up her insular world, or destroy it? *Bulrusher* voyages toward self-discovery in a town where the realities of race are submerged in water, and love keeps the company of redwoods.

*Bulrusher* was a finalist for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Drama. *Bulrusher* opens Friday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, and runs Thursday-Sunday through October 28<sup>th</sup> at The Ashby Stage in Berkeley.

Set in the months before the Montgomery Bus Boycott sparked the national movement for civil rights, *Bulrusher* follows the story of a young African American woman raised in the predominantly white town of Boonville, CA. Found floating in a basket on the Navarro River as a baby girl, *Bulrusher* is an orphan whose mysterious past leaves her feeling like a stranger in the only place she's ever known. Yet *Bulrusher* has a passionate connection to the river and a gift for clairvoyance that the locals admire—from a distance. Tough, stubborn and self-sufficient, *Bulrusher* discovers a love she never imagined when a black girl from Alabama comes to town. As the two girls share their entirely different experiences of race—and explore their sensuality—the expectations they have for their futures undergo a radical transformation.

A fluid, evocative tale that is both a coming of age story and a journey of spirit, *Bulrusher* also integrates a unique aspect of California history. In the 1880's the town of Boonville was the largest settlement in the Anderson Valley of Mendocino County. Residents of this northern town developed their own language that became known as "Boontling". A common phrase used by residents was "harpin' the ling" meaning "speaking the language of Boonville". In the play, Boontling is used by those "in the know" to separate the townspeople from outsiders, and to gossip about all things taboo. Over and around them weaves the magical Navarro River, which, like Boontling, holds the collective history of the town, and the key to *Bulrusher*'s haunted life.

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Co-Director Ellen Sebastian Chang comments: “Boontling is a linguistic phenomenon. It was a language developed and agreed upon by a group of individuals, similar to hip-hop slang. What is fascinating is how language holds culture intact. In *Bulrusher* the inhabitants of Boonville have their secrets and their differences yet their Boontling language creates a protective bubble over them. We see what happens when a newcomer to the community pierces this bubble. What happens when language gets lost?”

Shotgun Players have gathered an exceptional artistic team for the production of *Bulrusher*. Eisa Davis was a finalist for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Drama for *Bulrusher*, and is the author of *Angela’s Mixtape*, about growing up in the Bay Area with her aunt, activist Angela Y. Davis. Davis is also an actress and was most recently seen in Berkeley Repertory Theatre’s production of *Passing Strange*, which went on to a successful run at the Joseph Papp Public Theater in New York. A graduate of Harvard and the Actors Studio/New School, Eisa is a South Berkeley native. The language of the play has a poetic, lyrical quality and also includes several original songs, with a musical score composed by Clark Supryniewicz. The production will be co-directed by Ellen Sebastian Chang (*Thieves in the Temple of Hip Hop*) and Margo Hall (founding member of Campo Santo). Design by Lisa Clark (*Love is a Dream House in Lorin*), Costume Design by Shotgun Company Member Valera Coble (*Blood Wedding, The Forest War*). Lighting Design by Jarrod Fischer (*Blood Wedding*).

Shotgun Players’ cast of *Bulrusher* features Cole Alexander, Jahmela Biggs, Louise Chegwiddden (*Caucasian Chalk Circle, Man and Superman*), D. Anthony Harper (*Love is a Dream House in Lorin*), Terry Lamb, and Kirya Traber.

## CALENDAR LISTING

**WHAT:** Time: 1955. Place: Boonville, California. Outcast for her clairvoyance and her lack of family, *Bulrusher* finds out how much she doesn't know when she falls for a stranger from Alabama. But will this visitor open up her insular world, or destroy it? *Bulrusher* voyages toward self-discovery in a town where the realities of race are submerged in water, and love keeps the company of redwoods. *Bulrusher* was a finalist for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in Drama.

**WHEN:** *Bulrusher* previews September 19 & 20, opens on Friday, September 21, and runs Thursday – Sunday at 8PM through October 28. There will be three special 5PM Sunday matinees on 10/14, 10/21, & 10/28.

**WHERE:** The Ashby Stage, 1901 Ashby Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94703

**TICKET PRICES: Pay What You Can - \$25.** The first week of performances, September 19-23 are Pay-What-You-Can at the door for general seats. For September 27 – October 28, Tickets are \$17 for Thursdays, \$22 for Fridays and Sundays, and \$25 for Saturdays. Reservations for all performances are strongly advised. For every performance there will be tickets released at the door. The waiting list for these tickets begins taking names one hour before the performance.

For more information go to [www.shotgunplayers.org](http://www.shotgunplayers.org) or call 510.841.6500

For press photos, please download images from our website, or contact **Liz Lisle** at [liz@shotgunplayers.org](mailto:liz@shotgunplayers.org), or (510) 841-6500 x302