



**For Immediate Release**

## **The Ordway Announces 2011 Sally Ordway Irvine Award Recipients**

**20th annual Sally Awards honor extraordinary achievements  
for Arts Access, Education, Commitment, Vision, and Initiative**

**SAINT PAUL, Minn. (Monday, March 26, 2012)** – The Ordway Center for the Performing Arts today announced the recipients of the 2011 Sally Ordway Irvine Awards. Now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year, the Sally Awards honor extraordinary achievement in the visual, performing and literary arts.

The 2011 Sally Award winners are:

ARTS ACCESS: Rick Jacobson

EDUCATION: Ross Sutter

COMMITMENT: Kevin Smith

VISION: Ta-coumba T. Aiken

INITIATIVE: TU Dance

“Over the course of the past two decades, the Ordway has been privileged to honor more than 70 outstanding Minnesota artists, administrators, organizations and volunteers through these awards,” said Patricia A. Mitchell, Ordway president and CEO. “Our honorees personify the creative spirit and commitment to the arts for which our state is rightfully known. The depth and breadth of talent in Minnesota is truly remarkable.”

Shortly after its grand opening in 1985, Sally Ordway Irvine was presented with the “First Trust Award,” for her initiative, vision and commitment in the creation of Ordway Center for the Performing Arts. In 1992, the Ordway began the Sally Ordway Irvine Awards, which are presented annually to honor individuals and institutions that strengthen and enrich our entire state with their commitment to the arts and arts education through their Vision, Initiative and Commitment – the same attributes for which Sally herself was recognized. In recent years, we added two new awards honoring Education and Arts Access.

The 2011 Sally Award recipients were selected by a committee consisting of Ordway representatives, the 2010 Sally Award recipients, Minnesota State Arts Board and media representatives, and other leaders from the Minnesota arts and cultural community. The 2011 Sally Awards program is supported by the Minnesota State Arts Board, Minnesota Public Radio and Saint Paul Hotel.

**Rick Jacobson** has described more than 850 theater productions in the Twin Cities since 1994. He helped establish nationally recognized audio description practices for television by scripting

and/or voicing more than 1,900 children's and educational programs for PBS, Nickelodeon and other networks. He has described a wide variety of shows from Shakespeare to "Spamalot" and from Dame Edna to the public TV program "Secrets of the Genome Revealed." He has been the fifth and unseen spirit for blind patrons attending the Guthrie's "A Christmas Carol" since 1995. He has also described arena concerts for Neil Diamond, Tina Turner and Bette Midler, and theater productions for cruise passengers traveling through Europe, Alaska and Mexico.

Jacobson's interest in the stage began when he played a lumberjack in his fourth grade holiday pageant and continued through his wholly forgettable Blackbeard Teach in "The Devil and Daniel Webster" during high school. His first "real" theater experience was attending "The Merchant of Venice" at the Guthrie in the mid-1970s. At present, he works regularly with nearly 20 local venues and describes more than 90 shows each year. While he clearly enjoys theater, Jacobson truly treasures those moments when he can make a performance special for his patrons. Favorite memories include guiding people through sensory tours where they have an opportunity to feel props, costumes and scenery.

For nearly 30 years, **Ross Sutter** has impacted Minnesota through his work with schools and cultural organizations. His school residencies are a lively excursion into diverse cultures, with an emphasis on student involvement. His influence has spread out from his home on Minneapolis' Nicollet Island to communities large and small throughout Minnesota as well as elsewhere in the U.S. and in Europe. Sutter plays an array of folk instruments—guitar, bodhran, button accordion, dulcimer, bones—but is perhaps best known for his singular baritone voice, performing renditions of Irish, Scottish, Scandinavian, and American traditional and popular songs. Sutter nurtures a passion for the arts in schools and cultural organizations with his engaging performances and long-term residencies.

Sutter has performed on radio, television and at festivals, and works regularly in schools teaching the songs and folk dances that he has collected over the years. His rapport with children is extraordinary, but he also possesses the unique ability to thoroughly entertain the adults in the audience as well. His work is featured on the recordings "Walking on Air," "Up the Raw," "Crossing the Shannon," "Hunger No More," "Songs By Heart," "Over the Water," "Ye Banks and Braes," and on his popular children's CD, "Mama Will You Buy Me a Banana?"

**Kevin Smith** served as president and CEO of Minnesota Opera from 1986 to 2011, a period in which the company expanded its season from three to five productions, doubled its attendance and grew its annual budget from \$1.5 million to \$9 million. During his tenure, Minnesota Opera was recognized for artistic excellence, a commitment to the development of new works, an innovative approach to production design, a highly successful Resident Artist Program, and progressive educational and community outreach programs.

Smith's other accomplishments include the 1991 creation of the Minnesota Opera Center, which houses the company's offices, costume and scene shops and rehearsal facilities. He helped to establish the Arts Partnership, which ushered in a new era of collaboration among Minnesota Opera, The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, The Schubert Club and the Ordway, and served as its first president. Throughout his career, Smith has been active in statewide arts advocacy, serving on the board of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts and as a member of Vote Yes Minnesota, the steering committee for the campaign for voter approval of the Minnesota "Legacy" constitutional amendment.

A prominent leader on the national opera scene, Smith has served on numerous panels at the National Endowment for the Arts and been a board member of the American Arts Alliance. He is a past board chair of the national service organization Opera America and was instrumental in establishing its counterpart, Opera Europa. Smith is now Opera America's field consultant, specializing in extended consultations with opera companies in transition.

Saint Paul painter **Ta-Coumba T. Aiken** is the force behind some of Minnesota's most acclaimed public artworks. Since the early 1970s, he has created public art in collaboration with schools, neighborhood organizations, and city planning and development departments on works such as the Jax/Gillette Children's Hospital mural, the Minneapolis Central Library's tile fireplace and the North Side's Pilot City murals project. He supports the use of his artwork by organizations involved in pursuing social justice.

As an artist who has worked in the public sphere, Aiken has learned how to identify opportunities that exist in architectural, landscape and public works projects. He works in a wide range of glass, metal, clay, wood, and landscaping materials, and some of his recent public art projects with painted glazes on large ceramic installations have given his mural work new permanence.

Inspired by his mother at a young age, his first canvases already showed an eye-catching style and an advanced command of lines. Then, when an accident at age 11 impaired his perception of colors, the young artist turned to paint pens and ink, opting to paint directly from the bottles when having problems seeing colors. Today, the variety of tone and contrasting colors in his work have become hallmarks of Aiken's eye-catching style and perspective. Working from black and white outlines, he describes his process of coloration and shape-building as "spirit writing" and his usage of repeating imagery as "rhythm patterns." His artistic philosophy is driven by his desire to "create art to heal the hearts and souls of people and their communities by evoking a positive spirit."

**TU Dance**, led by Alvin Ailey veterans Toni Pierce-Sands and Uri Sands, has quickly become a leading voice in the Minnesota dance scene. Founded in 2004, TU Dance has garnered audience and critical acclaim for its diverse repertory and versatile artists, and for performances that are engaging, dynamic and generous. Modern dance, classical ballet, African-based, and urban vernacular movements are combined in inventive and unpredictable ways to provide opportunities for all audiences to experience the connective power of dance.

The company has enjoyed local and national recognition, receiving the Star Tribune's "Artists of the Year" recognition, the inaugural Princess Grace Award in Choreography, Dance Magazine's "25 to Watch," one of City Pages' 2011 "Artists of the Year," as well as one of METRO Magazine's 2011 "Keeper Awards." In 2011, TU Dance and the Ordway received a Joyce Award for the original commission of Uri Sands' piece "With Love," performed at the Ordway for a sold-out audience of 1,900.

In 2011 the organization opened TU Dance Center, realizing a vital part of Toni and Uri's vision to establish a welcoming hub for dance education, training and practice in Saint Paul. TU Dance Center provides year-round educational programming for dance students of all ages and levels of experience, and also serves as a home studio for the professional company.

### **Ordway Center for the Performing Arts**

The Ordway is widely recognized as one of the nation's leading nonprofit performing arts centers and Saint Paul's most elegant and inviting performance space. The Ordway's Music Theater and McKnight stages attract diverse audiences with an array of productions showcasing the finest in American musical theater, world music, dance, and vocal performance. Education and community engagement are integral to the Ordway's mission, with major initiatives including the annual Flint Hills International Children's Festival and Ordway Education programs that serve more than 50,000 students annually. The Ordway also serves as authorizer for the Saint Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists, a professionally guided academic and artistic environment that trains aspiring pre-professional performing artists. Together with The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Minnesota Opera and The Schubert Club, the Ordway is a member of the Arts Partnership and serves as the principal venue for their performances.