

“Ganking Mr. Guidry”

Harold Ellis Clark's
latest stage production
to premiere at
Le Petit Theatre

By Dean M. Shapiro, Senior Editor



PHOTOGRAPHY BY BERNIE SAUL

In everyday slang or street jargon, the word “ganking” means to swindle, scam, or deceitfully cheat someone out of something of value that belongs to them. Although the term didn’t exist in the year 1878, New Orleans area playwright, Harold Ellis Clark, has incorporated it into the title of his latest stage play, “Ganking Mr. Guidry.”



Harold with the cast of *Fishers of Men*, including Martin Bats Bradford, Oliver Thomas, Al Aubry, Damien Moses and director/set designer John Grimsley. PHOTO BY JIM BELFON

Set during the Reconstruction Era that followed the American Civil War, the play opens for a five-performance-only world premiere at Le Petit Theatre in the French Quarter on August 13. The production runs through the 16th.

In a recent interview, Harold explained, “The play is set in 1878 Louisiana during the sugarcane harvesting season, and there are five workers at a plantation who decide to stand up against the injustice that they believe they are receiving.

“One of these gentlemen is very proud of the fact that a deceased relative was a woman who participated in the 1811 Louisiana slave rebellion,” Harold continued. “During

that rebellion, she actually took a weapon from the slave owner of the plantation that she and others escaped from. That particular item is at the plantation where the young man is working in 1878, and he is determined to possess it.”

So who is Mr. Guidry? Harold

is asked. “He is the owner of the plantation,” the author replies. “Hopefully, you’ll feel his presence without even seeing him or hearing him talk.”

A native of Algiers on the West Bank of New Orleans, Harold developed an interest in the history of that neighborhood and the slave trade that went on there when enslavement was still legal. Slave ships unloaded their human cargo there, and a historical marker noting this was unveiled on the grounds of the old Algiers Courthouse during the commemoration of Algiers’s 300th birthday in 2018.

“I actually wrote a rough first draft for the play back in 2018, and subsequent to that, I spent all of those years trying to refine and revise it,” Harold explained. “Once I felt it was ready to go, I reached out to the Dillard University Theatre Department about doing a staged reading of the play there, and we did it in March of last year.”

The location of the staged reading was not a random decision on Harold’s part. He had worked at Dillard in the early 2000s as a public relations specialist and speechwriter for the university’s former president, Dr. Michael Lomax. And the timing for the play’s world premiere works out well, he noted. This year marks



A.J. Allegra, Le Petit Theatre’s artistic director, and Harold.

the 215th anniversary of the 1811 slave rebellion, the largest uprising of its kind in the U.S.

“And so I wanted to have the play produced in this important anniversary year,” Harold said. “I’m so happy that we ended up getting it to Le Petit Theatre. A.J. Allegra, their artistic director, read the play, and he really loved it. It was sort of like a spiritual thing where I just felt compelled to have the play staged this particular year because of the historical commemorations.”

Since taking up playwriting in 2010, Harold’s output has been prodigious. It includes thirteen full-length plays and several staged productions throughout the United States and abroad. One of his plays, titled “We Live Here,” was performed in Durban, South Africa, in 2017 with an entire cast of New Orleanians. Other works of his have won and been finalists in several national playwriting competitions.

In October 2025, Harold had what he called “a wonderful experience” at Loyola University in Chicago, during which he oversaw a staged partial reading of one of his best-known plays titled



Sydney, Madison, Harold and Cherie Clark at the recent world premiere of *Last Night at the Rue Bayou*, in which Madison was featured.

"Fishers of Men." He was also a featured speaker for what was termed The Rambler Brotherhood Project.

"I did an 18-minute presentation on the power of storytelling, and then the actors performed the staged reading. After they did their part, we got a rousing standing ovation and numerous questions about both the play and presentation," Harold recalled.

Like most playwrights, Harold aspires to have one or more of his works performed on a Broadway stage. He hasn't attained that goal yet, but he is creating works for the stage with that lofty objective in mind.

"Writing is something I have enjoyed since I was eight years old, and I was so happy to have discovered playwriting in 2010 after writing numerous unpublished novels that three literary agents couldn't sell to the major New York publishing houses and unproduced screenplays," he added.

"Writing dialogue has always been my strength, and I've gotten some positive feedback on it," Harold continued, referencing renowned New Orleans-based actor Lance Nichols. "I was so happy that Lance had been reading my work. He was the one who looked at it and said, 'You really write excellent dialogue, and you'd be an excellent playwright.' I took his comments to heart, and I'm so glad that I did."

Describing his work and what it means to him, Harold said, "Writing is very spiritual for me. I have ambitions about getting my work produced nationally and internationally but I don't lose any

sleep whatsoever about striving to connect with this producer or that producer. This agent or that agent. If I'm going to get to Broadway, it's going to be God who gets me there.

"I have always looked at my work as a ministry," Harold added. "Not because I'm preaching or have a message to impart, but because I'm in it for the long haul. It's not a hobby. It's serious business. That's what keeps me writing. I'm always on a quest to expand the reach of my work."

Referencing a 2023 production of "To Kill a Mockingbird" at the Saenger Theater, Harold said, "I was surprised to see the audience's high level of interest in a drama.



Actors Kenneth Brown, Jr and Harold Sylvester with Diane Mack of WWNO-FM talking about Harold's play, *Tour Detour*.

The performance I attended was sold-out. Musicals are cool, but a good drama can have a long-lasting emotional impact. New Orleans is a great testing ground for my work. If the audience doesn't like it, they will let you know, and if they do like it, they'll let you know that as well."

"Ganking Mr. Guidry" is being co-produced by Le Petit Theatre and HEC Communications, LLC, with generous support by Whitney Plantation in Wallace, Louisiana, and the 2026 Carol Sutton Memorial Grant. John Grimsley is the stage director, and cast members include Nicole Collins, Al Aubry, Martin 'Bats' Bradford, Kenneth Brown, Jr., and Rahim Glaspy.

This special limited engagement runs for only five performances from August 13-16 at Le Petit Theatre, 616 St. Peter Street in the French Quarter. For tickets and information, call the theatre at (504) 522-2081 ext. 1 or email boxoffice@lepetittheatre.com. Box office hours are on weekdays from 12 noon to 5:00 p.m.

Ticket prices range from \$35 to \$55 and are available at www.lepetittheatre.com. Groups of 10 or more receive a discount. Discounted parking is available for ticket-holders.



Harold with veteran actor Lance E. Nichols.

Le Petit Theatre in association with HEC Communications LLC presents

Ganking Mr. Guidry

A NEW PLAY BY HAROLD ELLIS CLARK
with generous support provided by Whitney Plantation and the Carol Sutton Memorial Grant

Tickets at LePetitTheatre.com
or call (504) 522.2081

August 13-16, 2026

Al Aubry	Martin Bats Bradford	Kenneth Brown, Jr.	Nicole Collins	Rahim Glaspy

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