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**ACT II PLAYHOUSE PRESENTS *SONGS FOR A NEW WORLD*,
MUSIC & LYRICS BY JASON ROBERT BROWN,
DIRECTED BY PETER REYNOLDS**

On Stage May 6 – June 1, 2008; Press Opening is May 9

AMBLER, PA – A show-stopping collection of transformational stories by one of musical theater's brightest composers is coming to Act II Playhouse, the professional theatre company of Ambler.

Act II Playhouse presents *Songs for a New World* by award-winning composer/lyricist Jason Robert Brown, on stage May 6 through June 1 (press opening is May 9). Peter Reynolds is Director and John Daniels musical directs this musical revue described by *The Hollywood Reporter* as "songs to pierce the heart and raise the rafters."

The cast is comprised of four powerhouse singers: Jennie Eisenhower and Nina Fluke, both of Philadelphia; and New Yorkers Jonathan Hack and Arthur W. Marks.

Songs for a New World made a big Off-Broadway smash at the WPA Theater in 1995. "I wrote these songs when I was struggling in a city that didn't even notice I was there, when I was a lonely and single college dropout living in a studio apartment in Greenwich Village," wrote Jason Robert Brown in a 2001 production note. "*Songs for a New World* is a show that suggests that our best solution for the stress and terror and anxiety we feel is to come together and form a community that will support and uplift each other. So my very personal little piece has turned out to shine a little light on a whole lot of people."

Peter Reynolds, Artistic Director of Philadelphia's Mauckingbird Theatre Company and director of Musical Theater for Temple University's Department of Theater, has directed numerous musicals in his career, but this is his first experience with a Jason Robert Brown vehicle. "I am thrilled to work on a show filled with his outstanding compositions," says Reynolds. "Brown knows how to write evocative music and he knows how to tell a good story. He is one of our most gifted composer/lyricists."

The music of *Songs for a New World* is heavily influenced by a broad range of genres, including pop, gospel and jazz. Its centerpiece song, "Stars and the Moon", has been recorded by countless singers, including Audra McDonald, Karen Akers and Betty Buckley. In Act II's production, that distinction goes to Jennie Eisenhower, who plays Woman 2. Eisenhower previously appeared at Act II in the 2004 production of *Harry Chapin: Remember When the Music*.

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Reynolds has high praise for his cast. "I have known Nina Fluke for a number of years and always admired her work; this is the first time I will get to direct her. Arthur Marks and I did *Little Shop of Horrors* together in 2004, and I am in awe of his voice and range. I have seen Jennie Eisenhower perform and know what a talented singing actress she is. We saw Jonathan Hack in New York and were impressed and excited by his work."

For their part, the singers are thrilled to be working with Reynolds. "Peter Reynolds is a brilliant director," says Arthur W. Marks (Man 1). "One of the things that I enjoy most about him is that there is always an open dialogue into the world of each character. You can feel each and every detail out thoroughly and dissect it until you get to the core essence of how you (the actor) will portray the character in the song."

Adds Nina Fluke (Woman 1): "The rhythm and melodies of this show are fun and beautiful. (Musical Director John Daniels and Peter Reynolds) are so open to together finding our own interpretation of the show instead of trying to match a CD or a previous production. And their positivism and joy for the piece is contagious!"

"I love the idea of performing this show in an intimate space such as Act II Playhouse," says Marks. "It gives the audience and artist the opportunity to connect much deeper. It also doesn't call for amplification, which can take one out of listening to the text and beauty in every line."

The team includes set designer Bill Pollock, costume designer Alisa Sickora-Kleckner, lighting designer Melissa Guyer, and sound designer Matthew Aaron.

The final dress rehearsal of *Songs for a New World* will be open to the public on Sunday, May 4, at 12 p.m. Suggested donation is \$10, and all contributions will be donated to American Cancer Society Relay For Life®, a community event that allows individuals from all walks of life raise money and join in the fight against cancer.

Three preview performances will be held May 6-8, with tickets discounted at \$25. Opening night is May 9, followed by a reception at Agavé Grille in Ambler. All evening performances are at 8 p.m., and matinees begin at 2 p.m. on Wednesdays and Sundays. *Songs for a New World* is sponsored by Fox Rothschild LLP.

Tickets are \$30 for all Wednesday-Thursday performances and \$40 for Friday through Sunday shows, with discounts available for groups of 10 or more. Tickets are available by calling the Act II Box Office at (215) 654-0200 or online at www.act2.org.

ABOUT ACT II PLAYHOUSE

Act II Playhouse is a 130-seat professional theatre located in Ambler, PA. Each September-June season, Act II presents a mix of entertaining comedies, musicals and dramas. In 2002, just three years after it opened, Act II Playhouse was awarded "Best of Philly" Suburban Theatre Company by *Philadelphia Magazine*. Act II operates under a Small Professional Theatre (SPT) agreement with Actors' Equity Association. Bud Martin is Executive Producer of Act II Playhouse; Stephen Blumenthal is Producing Artistic Director.

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ARTISTIC PROFILES

JENNIE EISENHOWER (Woman 2) last appeared at Act II in *Harry Chapin: Remember When The Music*. Off Broadway: *Suburb* at the York, *Bus To Buenos Aires* at EST, *Dreamhouse* at MITF. Philadelphia credits: The Arden, The Wilma, Philly Theatre Company, Bristol Riverside Theatre and Media Theatre, where she won a best supporting actress Barrymore Award for her work in *The Wild Party*. Film: *Mona Lisa Smile*. She recently played matchmaker to Gus the Groundhog in a PA Lottery commercial.

NINA FLUKE (Woman 1) is thrilled to make her Act II Playhouse debut! Regional credits: Rumplesleeper in *Cats* and Minnie in *West Side Story* at Walnut Street, Anytime Annie in *42nd St.* at Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, Patty in *Grease* at Kansas City Starlight, Val in *A Chorus Line* at Lenape RPAC, and Mae in *The Wild Party* at Media Theatre. Featured dancer in *Across The Universe*, director Julie Taymour.

JONATHAN HACK (Man 2) is excited to make his Act II Playhouse debut in such a wonderful show. Tour: *Miss Saigon* (u/s Chris). New York and other: *The Wild Party* (Burrs), *The Day the World Went Queer* (Mikey), *Jekyll+Hyde* (Lord Savage), *Kiss Me Kate* (Fred), *Falsettos* (Mendel), and many more.

ARTHUR W. MARKS (Man 1) made his professional debut in 1992 with the Kansas City Symphony Orchestra. Marks has since performed as a soloist with the Baltimore Symphony, Des Moines Symphony, Wichita Symphony Orchestra, Vivaldi Travelling Virtuoso Orchestra (NYC), Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra. Marks has performed on stages/classical venues in Rome, London, Berlin & Leipzig, Germany, Paris and Vienna. Marks not only performs in the classical genre, but is often seen on musical theatre venues/stages across the U.S. and abroad. Off-Broadway: *SIDD*, based on the novel Siddhartha by Herman Hesse (New World Stages), *The Screams of Kitty Genovese* (Theatre at St. Clements), *Backstage at the Funky B* (Producers Club). Regional: *Songs for a New World* with Barbara Walsh and Liz McCartney (George Street Playhouse), *Richie (A Chorus Line)*, *Mary Sunshine (Chicago)*, *Simon Zeolotes (Jesus Christ Superstar)*, *Mereb (Aida)*, *Mungojerrie (Cats)* and *Cat in the Hat (Seussical)*. Marks is also proud to be the "Ugly Duckling" in *Honk!* Marks has been preserved on the first recording of *Honk!*, which he recorded with Music Theatre of Wichita. Marks has just finished a production of the World Premiere of *It Happened in Little Rock: The Legacy Project* at the Arkansas Repertory Theatre. He had the pleasure of playing Ernest Green, one of the infamous nine. Marks has directed/choreographed regional productions of *Eubie*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Sophisticated Ladies* and co-choreographed two productions of *Swing!* Marks has also recently musical directed a production of *A Christmas Carol* at the Actors Theatre of Phoenix. Marks has also been an Artist in Residence with Broadway veteran Karen Curlee for the Delaware Dance Academy.

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PETER REYNOLDS (Director) -- Peter currently serves as Artistic Director of Mauckingbird Theatre Company where this winter he staged Moliere's *The Misanthrope*, and as the Director of Musical Theater for the Department of Theater at Temple University. For Temple Theaters, he has directed productions of *Into the Woods*, *Ragtime*, *Company*, *Pericles*, *Shakin' the Mess Outta Misery* and *Beautiful Thing*. Peter also had the pleasure of serving as an Assistant Professor of Theatre at Villanova University, where he directed *Baby* and *The Robber Bridegroom*. He has directed for the Walnut Street Theatre, Hedgerow Theatre, Philadelphia Theatre Company/Philadelphia Young Playwrights collaborative festivals, and he spent two seasons with the Lenape Regional Performing Arts Center in New Jersey assisting the Producing Artistic Director. Peter hails from the Midwest and spent six years as Artistic Director of HealthWorks Theatre-Chicago, winner of the 2000 Award of Excellence in Prevention Education presented by Mayor Daley and the Chicago Department of Public Health as well as the 2001 Hall of Fame After Dark Award. Regionally he has worked at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, HotCity Theatre-St. Louis, Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre, Chicago Dramatists, Theatre Building Chicago, Apollo Theatre-Chicago, City of Maples Repertory, Face to Face Productions, Lillian Russell Theatre, and on the stages of the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign and Southern Illinois University.

JOHN DANIELS (Musical Director) – John studied music at Ithaca College in Ithaca, NY and Temple University here in Philadelphia. Having recently returned to the area, his most recent credit was also his area debut: as the Musical Director of *Baby* at Villanova University, also with Peter Reynolds. Before moving back to Philadelphia, John musically directed *Gypsy*, starring Karen Mason, at the Westchester Broadway Theatre. On the road, he was a keyboard player with the national tour of *Camelot* starring Michael York, Rachel York, and James Barbour. Other tour credits include Musical Direction for the National Tour of *Cabaret* and playing keyboard with the National Tour of *Mamma Mia!*. Regionally, some of John's credits include *Barnum* with Terri White, *The Hot Mikado* with B.J. Crosby, both at Westchester, and *Aida* with Adrian Zmed at Sacramento Music Circus. John was a staff accompanist at Wilkes University and Marymount Manhattan College and has done a variety of freelance cabaret and accompanist work.

JASON ROBERT BROWN (Playwright) has been hailed as "one of Broadway's smartest and most sophisticated songwriters since Stephen Sondheim" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), and his jubilant theater music has been heard all over the world. *The New York Times* refers to Jason as "a leading member of a new generation of composers who embody high hopes for the American musical." Jason is the composer and lyricist of the musical *The Last Five Years*, which was cited as one of *Time Magazine's* 10 Best of 2001 and won Drama Desk Awards for Best Music and Best Lyrics. Jason won a 1999 Tony Award for his score to *Parade*, a musical written with Alfred Uhry and directed by Harold Prince, which premiered at Lincoln Center Theatre in December 1998, and subsequently won both the Drama Desk and New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards for Best New Musical. *Parade* was also presented on a national tour in 2000, which Jason conducted. Jason's first musical, *Songs for a New World*, a theatrical song cycle directed by Daisy Prince, played Off-Broadway at the WPA Theatre in the fall of 1995 and has since been seen in more than 200 productions around the world. Jason's newest musical, "13," written with Dan Elish and directed by Todd Graff, premiered this January to rave reviews at Los Angeles's Mark Taper Forum and took home four L.A. Drama Critics Circle Awards in March.

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