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MEDIA

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'TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD' COMING TO THE LA MIRADA THEATRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, FEBRUARY 27-28, IN AN ORIGINAL PRODUCTION FOR TEENS BY PHANTOM PROJECTS TROUPE

LA MIRADA, CA – As part of its mission to reach young people with the power of theatre, La Mirada-based Phantom Projects Educational Theatre Group will stage a new production of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* on February 27 and 28 at the La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts.

Performances are at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. both days, with \$5 middle school student tickets, \$12 high school student tickets and \$15 for the general public now available by calling the La Mirada Theatre Box Office at (562) 944 9801 or (714) 994 6310, or by going online to lamiradatheatre.com.

Janet Miller directs this adaptation by Christopher Sergel. Kathy Gillespie and Barbara Wiesel designed the costumes. The cast is LeVanna W. Atkinson-Williams, Marty Baum, Dimitri Chesne, Larry Creagan, Bridget Curran, Steve DeForest, John Dyer V, Fred A. Fluker, Shirley Hatton, Jared Hoffman, Erin Holt, Lee Dylan Johnson, Kwesiu Jones, Philip Lance, JoAnne Wade Martin, Bob Jay Mills, Sienna Moffitt and Georgia Samples.

The Play

Coming at the dawn of a decade of change, the impact of Harper Lee's novel on America cannot be overstated. Published in July 1960, it was chosen by three book clubs, received 14 printings and sold two and a half million copies in its first year. It won the 1961 Pulitzer Prize and by its second anniversary had spent 100 weeks on the bestseller list and sold five million copies in 13 countries.

Its unflinching depiction of racism in America was concealed in the innocence of its narrator, Scout Finch (Moffitt), a precocious 8-year-old. Set in a small town in Depression-era Alabama, *To Kill a Mockingbird* follows three years punctuated by the arrest and eventual trial of a young black man accused of raping a white woman. Scout and her brother Jem (Hoffman) are being raised by their widowed father, Atticus (DeForest), a lawyer determined to represent the unjustly accused, regardless of race. The result, in the play as in the novel, is a timeless and meaningful work of art.

The Producer

To Kill a Mockingbird is the second production in Phantom Projects' season. The season

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of three plays and a Young Artists Workshop, is directed at teenagers and their families. By providing a combination of classic texts from High School curricula and original message-based plays about issues of immediate relevance to young people, Phantom Projects uses the theatre experience to inspire the community’s teens.

“We want to be a positive force,” said Cisneros, who founded the company as a teenager 10 years ago, “and give teens ways to connect with their world through art. During our shows, and in the question and answer sessions after the performance, they discover this incredible relevance in the same literature they might have dismissed in the classroom. It helps open their eyes to a whole world of urgency, intelligence and beauty they may have completely tuned out. And in the issue-oriented shows, which feature teen casts, they see peers who are working hard to make a difference. That’s another powerful form of inspiration for them. They always have lots of questions for cast members.”

Ten years ago, then 17-year-old Cisneros was inspired after his High School English teacher, Bruce Gevirtzman, staged a play he had written for his students. The young drama student had suggestions about how the story about teen pregnancy and abstinence might have more impact. When Gevirtzman agreed to let him tinker with the script and then direct a second production, Phantom Projects was born.

A decade later, the non-profit Phantom Projects Educational Theatre Group operates on an annual budget of \$200,000, presenting its plays at the La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts and on a tour of schools and community centers across five Counties in Southern California. Gevirtzman’s latest script, *Through These Eyes*, is new play about self-image and danger of behavior that can lead to eating disorder. It will receive its premiere in May, directed by Cisneros.

For more information on Phantom Projects Educational Theatre Group visit phantomprojects.com or call 714-690-2900.

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To Kill a Mockingbird contains mature language relevant to the play’s time setting.

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Artist Bios

Christopher Sergel (Adapter) (1918-1993) wrote an adaptation of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* that was produced on Broadway. With Dramatic Publishing he wrote adaptations of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Cheaper By the Dozen*, *The Mouse That Roared*, *Up the Down Staircase*, *Fame*, *Black Elk Speaks* and many more. His love of theatre was just one of his many interests that led him on adventures throughout the world: he served two years as captain of a schooner in the South Pacific; reported from the African bush for *Sports Afield* magazine, and taught celestial navigation as a lieutenant commander during WWII.

Janet Miller (Director) has directed and/or choreographed more than 100 musicals ranging from *Anyone Can Whistle* to *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*. She has numerous teaching credits on both coasts, most notably the prestigious Choate Rosemary Hall in Connecticut. Janet is a sought-after tap instructor, and enjoys the fact that so many of LA's finest musical theatre performers have passed through her classes. She is known for her astute coaching of actors for musical theatre roles, and her keen 'show doctoring' ability. She is the recipient of the 2003 Excellence in Art Award for Drama from the city of Torrance, and was awarded a 2004 Choreography Garland for *The Marvelous Wonderettes* in LA. Janet holds a degree in musical theatre from CSUN and is a proud member of SSDC.

LeVanna W. Atkinson-Williams (Calpurnia) is making her California stage debut with Phantom Projects after relocating from New York in 2005 to pursue career in voiceover. Previous roles have included Clytemnestra in *Iphesenia*, Ella Hammer in *The Cradle Will Rock* and Thami Mbikwana in *My Children: My Africa!* She graduated Siena College in 2004 with a BA in Creative Arts.

Marty Baum (Judge Taylor) is a graduate of Loyola Marymount University who has been teaching in Lennox for the past 27 years. When he isn't teaching he can be found singing and acting. Past roles include: Caiphas in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Oscar in *The Odd Couple*, the Seargant of Police in *Pirates of Penzance*, and Colonel Pickering in *My Fair Lady*.

Dimitri Chesne (Dill) is an 11-year-old whose credits include *42nd Street* at the Pierson Playhouse (Billy Lawlor), *Fiddler on the Roof* at the Morgan Wixson Theatre (Fyedka), and *Dear Charlotte* at the Crossroads Middle School Theatre (Davies), and several national and international commercials. He enjoys writing, directing and editing his own movies, playing electric guitar, singing, tap dancing, karate, skateboarding and kickboxing.

Steve De Forest (Atticus Finch) is making his Phantom Projects debut. His stage credits include Dr. Craven in *The Secret Garden* (US & New Zealand tour), Emile de Becque in *South Pacific* (Buena Park Civic/TTC), King Arthur in *Camelot* (TTC), Benjamin Guggenheim in *Titanic* (CLOSBC), Miles Gloriosus in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (SCLO), El Gallo in *The Fantasticks* (MB Players), Dr. Carrasco in *Man of La Mancha* (SCLO), Captain von Trapp in *Sound of Music* (CCCLO/TTC) and Beverly Carlton in *The Man Who Came To Dinner* (TTC).

John Dyer V (Heck Tate), originally from Atlanta, has worked in films such as *Phone Booth* and *Ali*, the television show "The Practice," and cabaret. He is currently working on an autobiographical one-man show *Screwball Arrangements* and recently completed his first screenplay, an adaptation of the novel *Lilith* by George MacDonald.

Shirley Anne Hatton (Stephanie) is happy to be working with Phantom Projects for the first time and with director Janet Miller for the “umpteenth.” She recently was seen as Fraulein Schneider in *Cabaret* for Torrance Theatre Company and appeared as Ruth in *Pirates of Penzance* and Queen Eleanor in *The Lion in Winter*. Other favorite shows include *The Sound of Music* (Elsa), *Quilters* (Jenny), *Nunsense* (Sister Amnesia), *Zorba* (The Leader and Madame Hortense), *Company* (Sarah) and *Sunday in the Park with George* (Frieda) at The Pageant of the Masters in Laguna. Shirley can currently be seen in Killer Entertainment’s productions of *Alibi Aboard* in Long Beach and *The Password is Murder* in Costa Mesa. She also appeared in the film *Bull Durham*.

Jared E. Hoffman (Jem) has, at 13, already lived in Denver, Vail, Fort Lauderdale, Orlando and now Orange County, where he joined the Laguna Playhouse’s Improvisation Troupe just weeks after arriving. It was a Troupe member who suggested he audition for Jem, a few days after finishing he had finished the original for 8th grade.

Erin Holt (Mayella) returns to Phantom Projects after appearing in *Of Mice & Men* and *The Crucible*. Other credits include *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Fantasticks* and *The Sound Of Music*. She started acting in community theatre and school productions while in 8th Grade. A graduate of UC Irvine, where she studied acting, Erin now lives in Los Angeles, pursuing an acting career.

Kwesiu Jones (Tom Robinson) is returning for his second production with Phantom Projects following *Of Mice and Men*, as Crooks, in 2005. He television appearances include “General Hospital,” “24” and “NCIS.”

Philip Lance (Mr. Gilmer) is a native of Rhode Island. His stage credits include Bo Decker in *Bus Stop*, Dolan in *Mr. Roberts*, Vince Fontaine in *Grease*, and Simon Mostyn in *Murder on the Nile*. He is also a stand-up comedian, and appeared as a finalist in the National Lampoon Comedy Search on Showtime. He has appeared in non-speaking roles on “The West Wing,” “Star Trek Enterprise,” “Will and Grace,” and has the honor of being Agent Sculley's last autopsy corpse on the series finale of “The X-Files.”

Sienna Moffit (Scout) was an original cast member of Mattel’s American Girl Theatre in Los Angeles and appeared on Disney’s television production “What’s the Word,” “Untold Stories of the ER” and “The Closer.” She is in a new film, *The Perish Nine*, which will screen at the 2007 Sundance Festival.

Georgia Samples (Mrs. Dubose) appeared in the film *Contact* and the television show “Beetleborgs Metallix.”