

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Tuesday, February 3, 2009

CONTACT: Patrick Finlon, PR Director

315-443-2636 or pjfinlon@syr.edu



New Play Workshop Program to Showcase Work of SU Alumni

(Syracuse, NY)—Now in its third year, the New Play Workshop Program in the Department of Drama at Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) will present a public workshop performance of *Falling to Earth*, a new musical by alumni Tom Gualtieri (BFA in Musical Theatre, '90) and David Sisco (BA in Vocal Performance, '97). *Falling to Earth* will run February 6-15 at 936 East Genesee Street (3/4 of a block east of Phoebe's Restaurant). Performances are free and open to the public, and seating can be reserved by contacting Marie Kemp, Assistant Professor in the Department of Drama, at mckemp@syr.edu.

This year's workshop has been made possible through the generous financial support of Broadway's Araca Group (producers of *Wicked*, *Urinetown*), founded by drama alumni Hank Unger (BFA in Drama, '90) and Michael Rego (BFA in Musical Theatre, '90). Writers Gualtieri and Sisco spearheaded the grassroots campaign for funding, which includes additional support from various drama alumni and friends of the writers. Faculty member Marie Kemp is thankful to those who have supported this work, hoping to someday receive an endowment to secure the program's future.

Marie Kemp began Syracuse University's New Play Workshop Program 3 years ago, fulfilling a need to contribute to the future of theatre while giving students a unique educational opportunity. "Playwrights need safe places to develop their work, and our students need the experience of creating a role from the ground up from which they have no footprint," said Kemp. "To me, it is obvious that our schools and universities are the places to nurture this work. We are reaching out to the theatre community and shaping its future. Professional writers, composers and directors are hearing about SU Drama in a new way."

This year marks the first time that the writers will be in residence throughout the entire workshop process. Rehearsals began January 13, and there has been significant writing and rewriting in preparation for the public workshop performances.

Lyrics and Book writer Tom Gualtieri believes workshops are essential to the writing process. "It would be a rare genius who brought a piece to the stage without rewrites," he notes. "The benefit of the SU program is that we get away from the stresses of New York City and can focus almost exclusively on the work itself, with the added bonus of having a wonderful cast from the University who are enthusiastic, talented and playful. For me that's very exciting - to share this experience and mentor the students through the process."

Falling to Earth is a serio-comic retelling of the myth of Pygmalion & Galatea, set in ancient Cyprus, but filtered through a skewed, contemporary lens. The artist Pygmalion finds himself unable to finish a statue of Venus in time for the annual feast day. Frustrated by interference from both his lusty friend and a mysterious serving girl, Pygmalion turns his attention toward the statue and soon discovers that his creation has a life and story of her own. The appearance of a beautiful but neurotic goddess further complicates matters when she brings the statue to life. Soon all the characters, including the artists' creation, are forced to look deeper into themselves and let go of their once secure notions of life, love and self.

In its first year, the New Play Workshop Program presented a new musical adaptation of *Little Women*. A professionally staged production at Village Theatre (Everett, WA) followed, and the songwriting team of Alison Hubbard and Kim Oler were honored with a coveted Richard Rodgers Award for their work. *Little Women* continues to gain momentum in regional theatres around the country.

The second year of the program featured a work by SU alumnus Matte O'Brien (BFA in Musical Theatre, '04) entitled *The meaning of life. . .and other useless pieces of information*. Currently O'Brien's musical *White Noise* is slated for a 2009 Broadway opening.

CREATORS

Tom Gualtieri (Lyrics, Book) is a playwright, lyricist, actor and director. He has written two short musicals, *The Supper at Elsinore* (with Joy Son) and *Last Call, My Darling* (with William Wade for Raw Impressions #18) as well as the plays *Me...and Medea*, *The Garden of the Earth* (about The Donner Party tragedy) and *That Play*, his solo *Macbeth* which sold out its run at the Midtown Theatre Festival and Ithaca's The Kitchen Theatre. Tom was the Assistant Director on *Right You Are* for the National Actors Theatre starring Tony Randall, Penny Fuller and Maria Tucci and has twice been Assistant Director to Nona Lloyd at NYMF: *Sherlock Holmes: The Early Years* and *The Night of the Hunter* in which he appeared opposite Dee Hoty. As an actor, Tom has played opposite Joanne Woodward in *Hay Fever*, Marin Mazzie in *South Pacific* (choreography by Rob Marshall) and had principal roles in *Privates on Parade*, *Dragapella!*, *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, *The Rivals*, *Cloud 9*. Film work includes the shorts *Fade to White*, *Rubberneck*, *Blinding Goldfish* and *That's All She Wrote*. He is a proud original cast member of Off-Broadway's *Naked Boys Singing*, having written and directed 7 of their popular skits for various BC/EFA benefits (appearing twice as Mrs. Anna). He also provided additional material for two Broadway Bares events. Tom is the recipient of the Best Actor award from the National Gay & Lesbian Theatre Festival for David Sisco's *BAIT*, which also played a sold out run at the Stage Left Studio. He is an advanced member of the BMI Workshop and teaches acting at CAP21.

David Sisco (Music, Book) received his BA in Vocal Performance and Composition honors from Syracuse University, and a MM in Vocal Performance from Boston

University School for the Arts. A member of the Dramatist's Guild and the esteemed BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theater Workshop (Advanced), David is the author of *Here I Am: A Musical Personal Ad*, for which he received the Alex Libby Award for Best Musical Performance at the 2002 Columbus National Gay & Lesbian Theatre Festival. Other shows include *Variations on a Theme of You*, *Sopranos* (featured at the 2002 NYC International Fringe Festival) and a one-act opera called *The Catbird Seat*. Sisco is also a prolific art song composer, and received a stipend from the National Endowment for the Advancement of Arts to present a recital of his music at the prestigious Liederkrantz Club in New York. His debut album, *Here I Am*, was released in spring 2003. As a budding playwright, his first play *BAIT* premiered at the 2006 Columbus Theatre Festival, winning six awards including Best Comedy and Best of the Festival. David's other writing projects include an LGBT Christian devotional entitled *An Open Door*, several short autobiographical stories and a screenplay with colleague Seth Greenleaf.

Laura Josepher (Director). New York: David Sisco's *BAIT* for the Left Out Festival, *Winning* and the award winning *Car Pool* for Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre, *Dating Games* by Garth Wingfield, *Anna Christie* at Gallery Players, and *Touching Howard There* and *Ash Wednesday* for Harbor Theatre. Regional: *Dirty Blonde*, *The Turn of the Screw* and *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change* at Stages Repertory Theatre in Houston, TX; *The Ugly Duckling* and *Trail of Tears* for GMT Productions (tour); O'Neill's *Hughie* at Provincetown Rep, and the operas *Hansel and Gretel La Boheme*, *Così fan Tutte*, *Die Fledermaus* and *Gianni Schicchi* for Quisisana Resort in Maine. Assistant Directing credits include *Monster* at Classic Stage Company (directed by Michael Greif), and Laurie Anderson's *Songs and Stories from Moby Dick* (co-directed by Ms. Anderson and Anne Bogart). Laura has a Master of Arts in Educational Theatre, and a Bachelor of Music, both from New York University. She is a member of the Lincoln Center Directors Lab, an Equity stage manager, and an Associate member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers.

CAST/PRODUCTION

Angela Travins (Venus) is a sophomore Musical Theatre major. **Christopher Dwan** (Pygmalion) is a sophomore Musical Theatre major. **Christian Leadley** (Paphos) is a sophomore Musical Theatre major. **Lauren Devine** (Galatea) is a junior Musical Theatre major.

Jannae Lehman (Stage Manager) is a sophomore Stage Management major. **Jordan Rosin** (Assistant Director) is sophomore Directing major.

SPONSORS

Founded in 1997 by partners Matthew Rego, Michael Rego, and Hank Unger, The Araca Group has grown from a start-up working out of a one room office into an internationally renowned merchandise and production company. The Araca Group solidified its reputation as a leading theatrical production company with the critical

acclaimed success of *Urinetown: The Musical* followed by *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* which starred Edie Falco and Stanley Tucci and the blockbuster musical *Wicked* on Broadway and throughout the world. Other recent Broadway productions include *The Wedding Singer*, *'night*, *Mother*, *The Good Body*, and *Match*. Recent Off-Broadway credits include *The Vagina Monologues*, *The Laramie Project*, and *Debbie Does Dallas*.

NEW PLAY WORKSHOP PROGRAM

Three years ago Marie Kemp spearheaded the development of a program in the Department of Drama that brings in professional writers and directors in the field who are given a workshop of their new piece. The purpose of the work has been to provide the students with a unique experience of being on the ground level of developing new works and to provide emerging writers a venue for developing the work away from commercial pressures. The Program creates an environment that encourages risk-taking and freedom to explore, while giving the students the experience of working with visiting artists who are actively involved in the world of professional theatre.

VPA AT SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

VPA is committed to the education of cultural leaders who will engage and inspire audiences through performance, visual art, design, scholarship and commentary. It provides the tools for self-discovery and risk-taking in an environment that thrives on critical thought and action.

Fact Sheet

The New Play Workshop Program at Syracuse University Presents

Falling to Earth

Book & Lyrics by Tom Gualtieri
Book & Music by David Sisco

Directed by Laura Josepher
Musical Direction by David Sisco

Pianist and Assistant Musical Director: Alice Muzquiz

PERFORMANCES: FEBRUARY 6-15

February 6 - 8 p.m.

February 7 - 8 p.m.

February 8 - 2 p.m.

February 13 - 8 p.m.

February 14 - 2 p.m.

February 14 - 8 p.m.

February 15 - 2 p.m.

LOCATION

936 East Genesee Street (3/4 of a block east of Phoebe's Restaurant)

TICKETS

Free tickets can be reserved by contacting Marie Kemp at mckemp@syr.edu

CAST

Angela Travins (Venus)
Christopher Dwan (Pygmalion)
Christian Leadley (Paphos)
Lauren Devine (Galatea)

PRODUCTION

Jannae Lehman (Stage Manager)
Jordan Rosin (Assistant Director)

###