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CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS & SPECIAL EVENTS

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THE STRANGE TREE GROUP PRESENTS *THE SPIRIT PLAY*, A WORLD PREMIERE AT THE DCA STOREFRONT THEATER, OCTOBER 5 – NOVEMBER 6

***Celebrated Playwright Emily Schwartz Brings Victorian-era Chicago to Life
During a Supernatural Craze that Swept the Country***

CHICAGO (September 8, 2011) – Filled with magic, mystery and live music, **The Strange Tree Group** brings Chicago's ghosts to life this Halloween season with ***The Spirit Play***. The world premiere production is written by **Emily Schwartz** and directed by **Jimmy McDermott**, who last collaborated on the smash hit show *The Three Faces of Doctor Crippen*, which won 2011 Joseph Jefferson Awards for Best New Work and Best Director. Presented in association with the DCA Theater, *The Spirit Play* will run at the DCA Theater's Storefront Theater, 66 E. Randolph St., in the heart of Chicago's downtown theater district, from October 5 through November 6, 2011. **Press night is Friday, October 7 at 7:30 p.m.** Tickets are currently on sale.

Séances, spirit mediums and supernatural occurrences took Victorian-era America by storm, as otherwise sensible people grasped at any means to reach out to their loved-ones on the other side. In the insular, upper-class world of 1870s Chicago, three scheming charlatans prey on the rich with elaborate tricks and magic during well-rehearsed séances. But when young Jane, the so-called medium, begins to receive unexpected communications from the dead, her world takes a stunning turn.

"Many parts of the story were extracted from 'true' tales found in antique spiritualist magazines written between 1850 and 1900. These were detailed stories from people who had been openly swindled or exciting allegories from stern believers who experienced the miraculous in their drawing rooms," shared Emily Schwartz, Playwright and Artistic Director of The Strange Tree Group.

"It's easy to call people foolish for believing in things like spirit circles and séances, but we've created a production that aims to surprise both our characters and our audience, giving everyone the chance to take his or her own journey of belief."

***The Spirit Play* was first developed as part of the DCA Theater's INCUBATOR Series in 2010**, a program that supports the creation of new work by Chicago theater companies by providing a month of free rehearsal space and resources. The Strange Tree Group is the first company to workshop a new play in the INCUBATOR Series and subsequently to bring that same play to the Storefront Theater as a fully realized production.

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“Developing ***The Spirit Play*** as part of the INCUBATOR Series was an enlightening experience,” shared Schwartz. “Most often play workshopping happens in my little living room upon various types of mismatched antique chairs. Having the luxury of a large rehearsal space, ample time to work as a team with The Strange Tree Ensemble and then the experience of having an outside audience give feedback was invaluable.”

“It’s full circle to be back at the DCA Storefront Theater now with this dynamic play that was only an idea when we entered the INCUBATOR Series last year,” added Associate Artistic Director Delia Baseman.

Emily Schwartz is the Artistic Director of, and Resident Playwright for, The Strange Tree Group. For the Trees she has penned the Joseph Jefferson Award-winning *Three Faces of Doctor Crippen*, as well as *The Dastardly Ficus and Other Comedic Tales of Woe and Misery*, *Mr. Spacky The Man Who Was Continuously Followed by Wolves* and *The Mysterious Elephant*, among many others. Schwartz is a Resident Playwright of Chicago Dramatists, an Artistic Associate of Collaboraction and the *Chicago Reader’s* best playwright of 2008.

Jimmy McDermott (Director) received the Joseph Jefferson Award for his direction of *The Three Faces of Doctor Crippen*, part of Steppenwolf’s 2011 Garage Rep. Additional credits include *The Maids*, *The Puppetmaster of Lodz*, *365 Days/365 Plays: Week #49*, *The Frog Prince*, *A Christmas Carol* and *The MLK Project: The Fight for Civil Rights* (Writers’ Theatre, where he served as Associate Artistic Director); *The Fourth Graders Present an Unnamed Love Suicide*, *The Elephant Man*, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, *Salome* and *Sweet Pretty Love Jam* (the side project); *Waiting for Godot* (Redtwist Theatre); *Tallgrass Gothic* (5th Floor Productions); *2,000 Feet Away* (Steep Theatre); *Fefu and Her Friends* (Lake Forest College) and the U.S premiere of *Boojum! Nonsense, Truth and Lewis Carroll* (Chicago Opera Vanguard & Caffeine Theatre). His work has also been seen at The Hypocrites and Collaboraction. McDermott holds an MFA in Directing from The Theatre School at DePaul University.

Award-winning magician Brett Schneider has designed beautiful illusions for *The Spirit Play* and is the company’s newest associate member. Schneider is a member of the world-famous Magic Castle in Hollywood, CA. He has been performing magic professionally for more than 10 years, and has performed hundreds of shows for audiences of up to 5,000 at venues across the United States, such as Symphony Hall in Chicago and The Orleans Hotel in Las Vegas. Schneider has received numerous awards including “San Francisco Stage Magician of the Year.”

The Strange Tree Group reassembles the majority of its 2011 Jeff Award-winning ensemble of *Shakespeare’s King Phycus* for *The Spirit Play*. **The cast features** Strange Tree Group company members Kate Nawrocki (Jane Foust); Delia Baseman (Ruth Foust); Matt Holzfeind (Mister Gerard); Scott Cupper (Hubert Redspell); Elizabeth Bagby (Miss Emery); Bob Kruse (Mr. Tennant); Jenifer Henry (Mrs. Buchard); as well as Strange Tree Group Associates Michael Downey (Mr. Buchard); Carolyn Klein (Miss Neal), along with Kay Schmidt (Mrs. Redspell) and Marty Scanlon (The Musician).

The crew includes Strange Tree Group Associate Artistic Director Delia Baseman (Costumes); Strange Tree Group Associates Brett Schneider (Magic Design); Tyler Core (Photography); Phineas X. Jones (Poster Design); along with Sarah Luse (Production Manager); Kathy Mountz (Stage Manager); Joe Schmeroly (Set Design); Jordan Kardasz (Lighting Design); Michael Huey (Music and Sound Design); and Megan Shuchman (Dramaturg).

The Strange Tree Group is a collective of multifaceted individuals dedicated to creating intricate, intimate theatrical experiences that extend beyond the boundaries of a traditional stage. The company produces works that inspire creativity not only in its actors but also its audience. The Strange Tree Group is committed to producing pieces that celebrate the strange and the magical; the dangerous and the fantastical; and the surprisingly usual nature of unusual behavior. For more information, visit www.strangetree.org.

Schedule & Ticket Information

Tickets are \$20 for general admission and \$15 for students and seniors with ID; \$10 for preview performances on October 5 and 6. Exclusive ticket price of \$50 for reserved front row seating with an autographed poster. Discounted \$15 tickets are available for every Thursday performance. The show runs Thursdays through Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. through November 6. There will be a post-show discussion after the October 13 show.

A lecture and magic presentation, “**Contacting the Spirits: Magic and Mentalism in the 19th century**” on Wednesday, October 26 at 7 p.m., will take place at the Storefront Theater. Admission is free.

All tickets are available by calling 312.742.TIXS (8497), visiting www.dcatheater.org, or stopping by the Chicago Cultural Center Ticket Office in the Chicago Cultural Center at 78 E. Washington Street, open Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 6 p.m. and Sundays, noon to 4 p.m. When available, tickets go on sale one hour before each performance at the DCA Storefront Theater.

Additional discounts are available for Chicago Cultural Center Mosaic Members, theater industry affiliates, military personnel, ADA companions and large groups. Discounted parking is once again available at Wabash Randolph Self Park at 20 E. Randolph. Patrons can receive the \$12 rate by validating their ticket at the Storefront Theater ticket office.

About DCA Theater

The DCA Storefront Theater and the Studio Theater, its companion theater located in the Chicago Cultural Center, comprise DCA Theater, an anchor of the downtown theater district. DCA Theater offers downtown audiences an unforgettable off-Loop theater experience with an exciting look at the vibrant theater companies that call Chicago home. The **DCA Storefront Theater** features a state-of-the-art and easily accessible theater located at 66 E. Randolph St. where audiences enjoy high quality work from Chicago’s most dynamic theater companies at an affordable ticket price. In addition to fully staged productions, the DCA Theater presents many other programs that showcase the diverse Chicago theater community. Special limited-run and one-night-only events include staged readings, radio plays, directing workshops and festivals.

The **DCA Studio Theater**, housed in the Chicago Cultural Center just across the street from the DCA Storefront Theater, hosts the **INCUBATOR Series**, a program designed to support the creation of new work by emerging Chicago theater companies. Utilizing the generous offering of free rehearsal space and resources, participants explore new projects, develop and refine styles during a three-week period that ends with a public showcase performance and post-show discussion.

Each season, the DCA Theater accepts proposals from the city’s emerging and developing theater companies who wish to bring their innovative productions downtown. Presenting companies receive free performance space and resources, while theater-goers get an exciting glimpse into Chicago’s world-renowned theater scene. **Proposals for the DCA Theater’s Fall 2012 production slots in the Storefront Theater and INCUBATOR Series are being accepted now through October 15, 2011.** For more information and to apply to either space, visit <http://www.dcatheater.org/yourshow/>.

Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events

The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) is dedicated to promoting an ongoing celebration of the arts; supporting the people who create and sustain them; and marketing the city's abundant cultural resources to a worldwide audience. DCASE, in partnership with the Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture, programs and promotes thousands of high-quality free festivals, exhibitions, performances and holiday celebrations presented each year at Millennium Park, Grant Park, the Chicago Cultural Center and other venues throughout the city.

Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture

The Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture (COTC) is dedicated to promoting Chicago as a premier cultural destination to domestic and international leisure travelers, providing innovative visitor programs and services, and presenting free world-class public programs. COTC supports local artists through grants and other resources and creates vital opportunities for artists of all levels. For more information please visit www.ExploreChicago.org.

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