

Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival opens *The Mystery of Irma Vep – A Penny Dreadful*: A Gothic Parody Full of Quick Changes, Cross-Dressing, and the Hilarious Undead

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Center Valley, PA—

Two actors, a multitude of quick changes, and an unstoppable “army” of stagehands take to the stage this summer with the return of Charles Ludlam’s *The Mystery of Irma Vep – A Penny Dreadful* at the Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, the professional theatre on the campus of DeSales University.

Lauded as “the funniest two hours anywhere” by *The New York Times* and “lunatic fun that keeps you in stitches” by *The Daily News*, *The Mystery of Irma Vep* previews June 20 and 21, opens June 22, and runs through July 14 in the Schubert Theatre at the Labuda Center for the Performing Arts.

Lightning illuminates the stage as a deafening thunderstorm descends upon Mandacrest Manor, home of Lord Edgar Hillcrest and his new wife Lady Enid. Though nearly abandoned, the quiet manor is anything but peaceful, with looming uneasiness and a mysterious air of anticipation lurking around every corner. In a parody of the gothic literary “penny dreadful” tradition, Charles Ludlam’s spoof reaches from the eerie moors of England to the depths of an Egyptian tomb.

Jim Helsinger, PSF veteran actor and director, returns to the director’s chair with this hilarious tour-de-farce for the second time in the Schubert Theatre, with the same cast, and the fourth time in his career, offering a keen insight into what makes Ludlam’s world irresistible to audiences across the country, saying “We love gothic vampires, werewolves—the whole sense of the thriller.”

Producing Artistic Director at Orlando Shakespeare Theater, Helsinger’s PSF directing credits include: *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Foreigner*, *Lend Me a Tenor*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Tempest*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. His PSF acting

credits include the roles of Shakespeare's Lady Bracknell, Master Ford, Malvolio, Arnolphe, Dogberry, and Bottom. Other regional credits include title roles in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Hamlet*, *Dracula*, and *Henry V*. His TV and film credits include: *From the Earth to the Moon*, *Mortal Kombat*, and *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*. Helsinger's playwriting credits include *Dracula: The Journal of Jonathan Harker*.

A hilarious sendup of Victorian melodrama, this comedic, quick-change sensation features an unforgettable cast of characters—all played by two actors—PSF veterans **Brad DePlanche** and **Christopher Patrick Mullen**, who revive their roles from 2007, each playing one of the kooky servants and the lord and lady of the house, respectively.

DePlanche's PSF credits include Pseudolus in *Forum*, Passepartout in *80 Days*, and Pompey in *Measure for Measure*. He has also worked regionally at American Conservatory Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Syracuse Stage, and South Coast Repertory

Mullen's work with PSF since 1992 includes, *Shakespeare In Love*, *Richard II*, *Love's Labours Lost*, *Julius Caesar*, *Pericles*, *Charley's Aunt*, *Hamlet*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Twelfth Night*, *Dracula...*, and 20 other productions. His other credits include the 1st National Tour of *West Side Story*, Off-Broadway's *The Runner Stumbles*, and Arden Theatre's productions of *Cabaret*, *Metamorphoses*, *Macbeth*, *A Little Night Music*, *Candide*, and *Assassins*.

"It takes a village to do a two person show," notes Helsinger, referring to the entire team of unseen artists who make the on-stage shenanigans possible alongside the designers. Helsinger shares that one of his favorite moments of the show is curtain call when the "army" appears from backstage.

Design for the show features the work of **Lisa Zinni**, costume designer for a multitude of PSF productions including *Evita*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Les Mis*, *Macbeth*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and the 2007 production of *Irma Vep*. An established costume designer, Zinni has worked on many acclaimed Broadway shows including *School of Rock*, *Cats*, *An American in Paris*, *The Play that Goes Wrong*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Rent*, and *Hair* as the Associate Costume Designer as well as many of the National and International touring companies.

Set and lighting design is by **Stephen TenEyck**, who boasts national and international set and lighting design credits. His PSF credits include shows such as *West Side Story*, *Evita*, *Ragtime*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Twelfth Night*. Outside of PSF, TenEyck has design credits for companies such as Dallas Theatre Center, The Gulfshore Playhouse, Syracuse Stage, Big Art Group, The Kitchen Theatre Company, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Hangar Theatre, Madison Opera, Syracuse Opera, Anchorage Opera, Minnesota Opera, and Florida Grand Opera.

Original sound design is by **Matthew Given**. As the resident sound designer for 10 years at PSF, he designed over 40 productions including *Macbeth* (2014), *A Winter's Tale*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *King Lear*, and *Dracula*.

Additional sound design for the production is by **William Neal**, the resident sound designer and sound supervisor for PSF and for DeSales University. He has designed sound and/or composed original music for over 65 productions, including the original Off-Broadway productions of *After*, *Daniel's Husband*, *Small World*, *Drop Dead Perfect*, and *The Little Prince*, as well as dozens of regional productions, including last summer's PSF production of *Richard II*.

Keenan and Nagle Advertising and David B. Rothrock and Patrina L. Rothrock are the production co-sponsors for *The Mystery of Irma Vep – A Penny Dreadful*; actor sponsors for this production are **Lee and Dolly Butz**.

Valerie Moritz Smith is the 2019 season sponsor. Associate season sponsors are Linda Lapos and Paul Wirth, Kathleen Kund Nolan and Timothy E. Nolan, The Szarko Family, and Harry C. Trexler Trust.

In this comedy melodrama of the supernatural, the only thing louder than the scene-setting thunder will be the uproarious laughter from the audience as this tale of deceit unfolds before their very eyes. "Fasten your seat belts...It's gonna be a bumpy farce," Mullen exclaims!

Performances are in the Schubert Theatre and are Wednesdays through Saturdays at 8pm; Tuesdays at 7pm; Sundays June 23 and July 14 at 7:30pm; and 2pm matinees are

Wednesdays June 26 and July 3, Saturdays June 29 and July 6 and 13, and Sundays June 23 and 30 and July 7 and 14.

The professional theatre company at DeSales University, PSF features acclaimed actors from Broadway, television, and film, winners and nominees of the Tony, Obie, Drama Desk, and other major theatre awards, from New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and around the country.

Summer 2019 Season:

Main Stage: Crazy for You (June 12 to June 30), Antony and Cleopatra (July 10 to Aug 4), Private Lives (July 18 to Aug 4), Shakespeare for Kids (July 24 to Aug 3).

Schubert Theatre: The Adventures of Robin Hood and Maid Marian (May 31 to Aug 3), The Mystery of Irma Vep (June 20 to July 14), Henry IV, Part 1 (July 24 to Aug 4).

For tickets, contact PSF at 610-WILL[9445], ext. 1, or www.pashakespeare.org.

About Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival

Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Patrick Mulcahy, is the only professional Equity theatre of its scope and scale within a 50-mile radius. PSF is one of only a handful of theatres on the continent producing Shakespeare, musicals, classics, and contemporary plays, all of which can all be seen in rep and in multiple spaces within a few visits in a single summer season. Similarly, PSF was among just a handful of theatres on the continent this summer to produce three Shakespeare plays in a single summer season. A patron would have to travel seven to nine hours from PSF to find a comparable range of offerings at a single theatre within a few weeks' time.

The Festival's award-winning company of many world-class artists includes Broadway, film, and television veterans, and winners and nominees of the Tony, Emmy, Obie, Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk, Jefferson, Hayes, Lortel, and Barrymore awards. A leading Shakespeare theatre with a national reputation for excellence, PSF has received coverage in *The Washington Post*, *NPR*, *American Theatre Magazine*, *Playbill.com*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and in recent seasons *The New York Times* has identified PSF as one of the leading

summer theatre festivals in the nation. “A world-class theater experience on a par with the top Bard fests,” is how one New York Drama Desk reviewer characterized PSF.

Founded in 1992 and the Official Shakespeare Festival of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, PSF’s mission is to enrich, inspire, engage, and entertain the widest possible audience through first-rate productions of classical and contemporary plays, with a core commitment to Shakespeare and other master dramatists, and through an array of education and mentorship programs. A not-for-profit theatre, PSF receives significant support from its host, DeSales University, from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts. With 150 performances of seven productions, the Festival attracts patrons each summer from 30+ states. In 27 years, PSF has offered 168 total productions (72 Shakespeare), and entertained 900,000+ patrons from 50 states, now averaging 34,000-40,000 in attendance each summer season, plus another 13,000 students each year through its WillPower Tour. PSF is a multi-year recipient of awards from the National Endowment for the Arts: Shakespeare in American Communities, and is a constituent of Theatre Communications Group, the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, and the Shakespeare Theatre Association. In 2013, leaders of the world’s premier Shakespeare theatres gathered at PSF as the Festival hosted the international STA Conference.

The Festival’s vision is for world-class work.

Principal Artist Bios:

JIM HELSINGER (Director) PSF Directing: *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Froeigner*, *Lend Me a Tenor*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. PSF Acting: Lady Bracknell, Master Ford, Malvolio, Arnolphe, Dogberry, Bottom. Other regional credits include title roles in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Hamlet*, *Dracula*, and *Henry V*. TV/Film: *From the Earth to the Moon*, *Mortal Kombat*, and *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*. Playwright: *Dracula: The Journal of Jonathan Harker*. Artistic Director of Orlando Shakespeare Theater in partnership with UCF. www.orlandoshakes.org

BRAD DEPLANCHE* (Nicodemus Underwood, Lady Enid Hillcrest, Alcazar) Favorite roles at PSF include Pseudolus in *Forum*, Passepartout in *80 Days*, and Pompey in *Measure for Measure*. For the last two years Brad has been playing the Genie in Disney's *Aladdin* aboard their cruise line. Other Regional: American Conservatory Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Syracuse Stage, and South Coast Repertory. A proud advocate for the LGBTQ+ community, he holds an MFA from ACT in San Francisco.

CHRISTOPHER PATRICK MULLEN* (Jane Twidsen, Lord Edgar Hillcrest, An Intruder) is a DeSales University graduate, CPM's work with PSF since 1992 includes *Shakespeare In Love*, *Richard II*, *Love's Labours Lost*, *Julius Caesar*, *Pericles*, *Charley's Aunt*, *Hamlet*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Twelfth Night*, *Dracula...*, and 20 other productions; *West Side Story* (1st National Tour); *The Runner Stumbles* (Off-Broadway); *Cabaret*, *Metamorphoses*, *Macbeth*, *A Little Night Music*, *Candide*, and *Assassins* (Arden Theatre). He is a member of Retro Productions (NYC) and a People's Light veteran of over 30 productions since 1989. Co-writer of *ChipandGus*. TV: *Law & Order*.

STEVE TENEYCK (Set Designer and Lighting Designer) is pleased to return to PSF. Some favorite past productions include *West Side Story*, *Evita*, *Ragtime*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Twelfth Night*. Design work for companies such as Dallas Theatre Center, The Gulfshore Playhouse, Syracuse Stage, Big Art Group, The Kitchen Theatre Company, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Hangar Theatre, Madison Opera, Syracuse Opera, Anchorage Opera, Minnesota Opera, and Florida Grand Opera. Steve is a member of United Scenic Artists Local 829 and teaches design at Ithaca College in New York.

LISA ZINNI (Costume Designer) is happy to be returning to PSF for *The Mystery of Irma Vep* with the same fantastic cast (Chris and Brad) and fearless director (Jim Helsing) as their first production 10 years ago. She designed last season's *Shakespeare in Love*, as well as many PSF productions over the years. Some favorites include: *Evita*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Les Mis*, *Macbeth*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Recent work includes designing the musical/comedy/rap/improv show *Freestyle Love Supreme* directed by Thomas Kail and co-created by Lin-Manuel Miranda; designing a new work for the Tulsa

Ballet titled *Remember Our Song*, choreographed by Andy Blankenbuehler; Associate Costume Designer for the TV event *Rent Live* on Fox; and a new musical adaptation of Sheridan's *The Rivals* at Bristol Riverside Theatre. Lisa is currently designing a production of *West Side Story* to open in August in Tokyo, Japan in the new 360 stage around theatre. Broadway credits include: Associate Costume Designer for *School of Rock*, *Cats*, *An American in Paris*, *The Play that Goes Wrong*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Rent*, and *Hair* as well as many of the National and International touring companies. Other design venues include: Orlando Shakes (*Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Pericles*, *Henry V*, *Titus Andronicus*, *King Lear* and *The Imaginary Invalid*), Walnut Street, Arden, and Riverside theatres. LISAZINNI.com

MATTHEW GIVEN (Original Sound Design) is very excited to return to PSF. He was PSF's resident sound designer for 10 years, during which time he designed over 40 productions. Some of his notable PSF designs include: *Macbeth* (2014), *A Winter's Tale*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *King Lear*, and *Dracula*. In 2014, Matthew joined Bucks County Playhouse as Director of Production & Facilities. Matthew holds an MFA in sound design from Ohio University. All my love to my wife Katie and our daughter Gracie.

WILLAM NEAL (Additional Sound Design) is the Resident Sound Designer and Sound Supervisor for PSF and for DeSales University. He has designed sound and/or composed original music for over 65 productions, including the original Off-Broadway productions of *After*, *Daniel's Husband*, *Small World*, *Drop Dead Perfect*, and *The Little Prince*, as well as dozens of regional productions, including last summer's PSF production of *Richard II*. William is a member of United Scenic Artists Local 829 and the Theatrical Sound Designers and Composers Association.

MAGGIE DAVIS* (Stage Manager) is back at PSF for a fourth season. Stage and production management credits include: *King Lear*, *Awake & Sing!*, *Oliver!*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Wild Duck* (Quintessence Theatre Group); *Yours*, *Anne*, among other productions (Half Moon Theatre); Seven seasons with the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival; *Christmas Rappings*

(Judson Memorial Church); *Radio City Christmas Spectacular* (Florida/Texas Tour); *Mike Birbiglia's My Girlfriend's Boyfriend*, *Tribes*, and *Hit the Wall* (Barrow Street Theatre); *Measure for Measure* (Fiasco/New Victory Theatre). Peace.

PATRICK MULCAHY (Producing Artistic Director, PSF) Since assuming leadership in 2003, Mulcahy has led PSF's surge in artistic excellence, financial stability, and national recognition. Accomplishments include first-ever grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, attracting a multitude of award-winning artists including winners and nominees of the Tony, Obie, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, Barrymore, and Emmy awards, a doubling of annual attendance, a successful campaign to double the Festival's endowment, and the expansion of the number of Actors' Equity contracts per season. He led the strategic planning process that led to PSF's *Vision 2030*, a commitment to world-class professional theatre, and coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and *The Washington Post*. As a professional director, actor, and fight director, credits include Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional theatre, television and radio. Mr. Mulcahy has acted with many industry luminaries including Don Cheadle, Angela Bassett, Cynthia Nixon, and Tony Shaloub at the New York Shakespeare Festival, The Roundabout Theatre, Hartford Stage, Great Lakes Theatre Festival, and the Walnut Street Theatre. He served as fight director for *A Few Good Men* on Broadway, and multiple Off-Broadway productions starring Marcia Gay Harden, John Mahoney, Patrick Dempsey, and John Savage. He directed Oscar nominee Vera Farmiga in *The Real Thing*, and, for PSF, directed *The Winter's Tale*, *Henry IV, Part 1*, *The Tempest*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Shakespeare in Love*. Also Head of Acting at DeSales, Patrick holds degrees in acting and directing from Syracuse University.

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