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## Theatre Muscles Into Atlanta Olympics

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The festival will host four world premieres, the longest running is native Atlantan Alfred Uhry's *Last Night at Ballyhoo*, produced by Atlanta's Alliance Theatre Company. The romantic comedy, by the author whose most famous works include *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Robber Bridegroom*, is set in Atlanta in 1939, during Ballyhoo, the major social event of the Jewish elite in that city. Two cousins take different approaches to love, one bringing the family closer together, another, tearing them apart.

The production will be directed by Ron Lagomarsino, who directed the world premiere of *Driving Miss Daisy* in New York.

*Last Night at Ballyhoo* opens July 20 and runs at the Alliance Studio Theatre through August 3, the final day of the theatre festival. The show kicks off the 1996-97 season at the Alliance, continuing performances at the 14th Street Playhouse from August 16 through October 6.

Joseph Chaikin and Sam Shepard will premiere their new drama *When the World Was Green* at the 14th Street Playhouse Mainstage, for six performances only, July 19-23. In a cold prison cell in quiet dialogue, a young female reporter and an old man experience the haunted nature of the past and present.

Presenting the Premiere is Atlanta's Seven Stages, a company that began producing in Little Five Points, Atlanta's emerging arts community, in 1979. From a theatre that once held only 60 people, the company is now housed in a complex with a 200 seat theatre, a 90 seat theatre, galleries, offices and technical booths. The company is committed to supporting new works and new artists, and frequently hosts international companies on the cutting edge.

After its world premiere, *When the World Was Green* will be workshopped and performed in Mid-April at Chaiken and Shepard's old stomping ground, the Magic Theatre in San Francisco.

Also produced by Seven Stages is the World Premiere of a jazz musical *Blue Monk*. This 80 minute 'play with music' by Robert Earl Price actually imitates through drama, the music of jazz legend Thelonious Monk. The characters names are Monk, Trumpet, Bass Drum, Vocalist, etc. As in jazz, each scene will be designed to produce feeling before reason or logic.

The play will run on the 14th Street Playhouse Second Stage, for four performances July 23-26. The role of Monk will be performed by Broadway and television actor Gilbert Lewis.

Also playing on the 14th Street Playhouse Second Stage is the fourth World Premiere of the series, an adaptation of a short story called *Harmony Ain't Easy*, adapted by David Thomas from Ferrol Sams. The play follows the journey of a married couple whose relationship is tested when their argument over where to park the car leads to disaster.

The play runs for four performances, July 29-Aug. 1, and is produced by ART Station, a thriving arts center in Stone Mountain Village that supports the community in visual and performing art.

The Royal National Theatre of Great Britain, imports the U.S. Premiere of *Dealer's Choice*, by Patrick Marber. After a long period of development at the Royal National Theatre Studio, the play opened in 1995 at the National's Cottesloe Theatre, where it enjoyed a long run before moving to a West Bank Theatre. *Dealer's Choice* won London's Evening Standard Award for Best Comedy, and was nominated as Best Play in the Olivier Awards.

The Royal National Theatre has won over 200 major drama awards in its 20 years of existence, and has established a world wide reputation resulting from its tours of productions like *Carousel*, *An Inspector Calls*, and *Indiscretions*.

*Dealer's Choice* will star many of the original London cast, and will run for four performances at the Alliance Theatre, July 10-13.

Atlanta's Horizon Theatre Company is reviving their critically acclaimed production of *The Good Times Are Killing Me*, on the 14th Street Playhouse Second Stage, July 18-21.

Written by the multi-talented Lynda Barry, known best for her *Ernie Pook's Comeek*, a comic strip syndicated in more than 50 papers nationwide, the show was adapted from the 70 page "novelini" introduction to her book of paintings.

The play explores memories of Barry, and how the seeds of racism are planted through experiences in early childhood. *Good Times* enjoyed runs off-Broadway and in Seattle, and received its Southwestern premiere at the Horizon Theatre Company, which houses an intimate 185 seat theatre in Atlanta's Five Points Business District. Horizon is dedicated to introducing new and contemporary plays and playwrights to Atlanta, and develops new plays through workshops and readings.

In addition to Ballyhoo, the Alliance Theatre Company will also revive it's critically acclaimed production of *Blues for An Alabama Sky*, by Pearl Cleage, in the Alliance Theatre, July 18-Aug. 3. Last year the Alliance hosted the World Premiere of the show, and this year the starring actors Phylica Rashad and Bill Nunn will again perform in the Olympic run.

*Blues* takes place in Harlem during the Great Depression. A cast of characters struggle to find their way, while the shadow of a smiling, free Josephine Baker hangs over them, reflected all the way from her home in Paris. Artistic Director of the Alliance, Kenny Leon, directs.

Two musical productions are being produced for the Festival. Jomandi Productions, which began in 1978 as a theatre company committed to the development of new works recreating the African-American experience, will revive their hit *Hip 2: Birth of the Boom*, a jazz, rhythm and blues, hip-hop musical that examines the challenges faced by African-American men, in their relationship to God, other men, and women.

Written by Thomas Jones II, *Boom* will also star the playwright, who is the founder of Jomandi. The four other male characters are named Do Wop I-IV. Additional music was written by music director, Keyth Lee, who has also worked on productions staged at Howard University, the Arena Stage, and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

*Boom* runs on the 14th St. Playhouse Mainstage, July 31-Aug. 3.

Actor's Express, known as Atlanta's "inventive and reliably entertaining theatre company" (*Creative Loafing*), is

reviving *The Harvey Milk Show* for five performances July 12-16, on the Second Stage of the 14th St. Playhouse.

Written by Atlanta natives, Dan Pruitt and Patrick Hutchison, the two act musical reveals the ascension, election and assassination of Harvey Milk. The production received great reviews when it first premiered at Actor's Express in 1991.

Three theatre companies from around the country are contributing their work to the Series. New York based John Houseman's Theatre Company brings its production of Geoffrey C. Ewings' *Ali* to the Festival. Co written by Graydon Royce, the one-man show portrays the boxing legend, Muhammad Ali, in a frank discourse about his dreams, self-revelations and faith.

Ewing portrays Ali in the tour-de-force that won him 1993 Obie and Audelco Awards for it's New York Production. *Ali* will run on the 14th St. Playhouse Mainstage, July 25-28.

Alabama Shakespeare Festival, the largest classical theatre in the American South, will bring its 1995 production of Dennis Covington's *Lizard* to the Festival, running July 13-16 on the 14th St. Playhouse Mainstage.

*Lizard* is a coming-of-age story of acceptance and reconciliation, featuring Norbert Butz in the title role he originated.

Theatre Emory presents Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki's Saratoga International Theatre Institute (SITI) in their production of *Small Lives/ Big Dreams*, derived from the five major plays of Anton Chekhov.

The piece, conceived and directed by Bogart, will play for only three performances in the Alliance Studio Theatre, July 11-13. Bogart uses pieces of Chekhov's plays to ask the questions, What is the role of our memories? What do we do with our past?

Bogart is the co-artistic director of SITI, with Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki. Together, with their ensemble, they strive to redefine and revitalize contemporary theatre through cultural exchange and collaboration. *Small Lives /Big Dreams* was produced Off-Broadway at PS. 122 in 1994.

Many American puppet theatre companies are performing in the Festival, and Yang Feng brings his puppet style all the way from China. Feng upholds a 200-year-old legacy of hand puppets, and presently is the only puppeteer and the youngest performer in the National Dramatists Association in China.

In *The Hungry Tiger and Other Tales From China*, Feng's puppets are manipulated without words to tell their stories. Set to Oriental music, the comical puppets take the shape of a hungry tiger, a pair of dueling warriors, circus members and more.

*The Hungry Tiger* runs at the Center For Puppetry Arts, July 22-27.

Tickets are in high demand, priced for \$25-35 each. For more information and ticket availability for the Theatre Series, call (404) 744-1996, or to receive a brochure, call (404) 224-1835.

-- By Blair Glaser

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