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## **WOOLLY MAMMOTH THEATRE COMPANY ANNOUNCES THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EVOLUTION OF ITS COMPANY IN 25 YEARS**

### **PLAYWRIGHTS, DIRECTORS, AND DESIGNERS ARE ADDED TO THE COMPANY AND WILL ENGAGE MORE DEEPLY WITH ACTORS IN PLAY PRODUCTION PROCESS**

(Washington, DC) – Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company is proud to start its 32<sup>nd</sup> Season with the announcement of an important evolution of the theatre's Company, a group of core actors formed originally in 1986. In addition to actors, the Company will now include, for the first time, a number of playwrights, directors, and designers. The goal of this change is to knit all of the theatre's artists more closely together around a shared sense of purpose, and promote a deeper collaborative process for each production. Woolly will build more projects around Company Members, and seek new ways to involve Company Members in the full life cycle of each play, from early script and design development through the community dialogue surrounding each production.

Over the past year, a group of Woolly staff and board members served on a Company Task Force to examine the past and future of Woolly's Company. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Howard Shalwitz, the Task Force gathered ideas and feedback from current and potential Company Members, examined lessons learned about maintaining and building companies at Woolly and other theatres, and clarified future goals. The members of the Task Force included Board Members J. Chris Babb, Linette Hwu, and Scott Schreiber with Managing Director Jeffrey Herrmann, Director of Artistic Development Miriam Weisfeld, and Production Manager Taryn Staples.

Following is a list of new members who are joining the Woolly Mammoth Company at the start of Season 32. Several of them are involved in our inaugural show of the season, ***A Bright New Boise*** by Samuel D. Hunter:

**Colin K. Bills** has designed the lighting for over twenty productions at Woolly Mammoth including ***A Bright New Boise***. Other recent Woolly credits include *Bootycandy*, *Oedipus el Rey*, and *In the Next Room or the vibrator play*. He's received three Helen Hayes Awards and is the 2009 recipient of a Princess Grace Fellowship in Theater.

**Michael John Garcés** directed last season's *Oedipus el Rey*, as well as Woolly's productions of *Recent Tragic Events* and *Grace*. He's the Artistic Director of Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles, and winner of the Alan Schneider Award for Directing.

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**Misha Kachman** designed the set for ***A Bright New Boise*** as well as Woolly's productions of *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, *Fever/Dream*, and *Oedipus el Rey*. He serves as an Assistant Professor of Scene and Costume Design at the University of Maryland.

**Robert O'Hara** was playwright and director of *Bootycandy* (Woolly World Premiere), playwright of *Antebellum* (Woolly World Premiere), and director of Woolly's production of *In the Continuum*. He received a 2010 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play for *Antebellum* and an OBIE Award for Directing the World Premiere of *In the Continuum* at Primary Stages.

**Emily Townley** is a member of the ***A Bright New Boise*** cast who has also appeared at Woolly in *House of Gold*, *Maria/Stuart*, *Spain*, *Fuddy Meers*, and *Wonder of the World*. She has performed at numerous area theatres including Studio, Rep Stage, Everyman, Round House, and the Folger.

**John Vreeke**, ***A Bright New Boise***'s director, has helmed many Woolly productions including *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, *Boom*, *Our Lady of 121<sup>st</sup> Street*, and *Homebody/Kabul*. He has received four Helen Hayes nominations including Best Director and has worked in other area theatres including Theater J, Forum Theatre, and the Kennedy Center Theater for Young Audiences.

These new Company Members will be joining current Company Members Doug Brown, Jessica Frances Dukes, Daniel Escobar, Rick Foucheux, Kimberly Gilbert, Mitchell Hébert, Naomi Jacobson, Sarah Marshall, Jennifer Mendenhall, Bruce Nelson, Kate Eastwood Norris, Michael Russotto, Dawn Ursula, and Michael Willis. Longtime Woolly Company Members who are not currently active at the theatre will be honored as Company "Alumni." They include Grover Gardner, Jason Kravits, Christopher Lane, Namu Lwanga, Nancy Robinette, Rob Leo Roy, Rhea Seehorn, and Eric Sutton.

"The idea of a company was embedded in the founding of Woolly Mammoth in 1980 and has been a key to our identity and success," said Artistic Director Howard Shalwitz. "We have occasionally had actors who also directed or wrote Woolly plays. But by opening the door more fully to directors, designers, and playwrights who share the adventurous artistic values and collaborative spirit of our actors, I believe we are launching a new chapter. We have always been happiest when we work with artists over a long period of time, and now we will be drawing a fuller range of artists into the full investigative process and shared dialogue around each play. In doing so, we hope to tighten the connections among three key aspects of Woolly Mammoth's mission: to develop and produce provocative new plays, to build and sustain a company of outstanding theatre artists, and to engage deeply with our community."

The preparations for Season 32 have involved a number of specific steps aimed at deepening the role of Woolly Company Members in the investigative process around each production. The cast and design team for ***A Bright New Boise*** participated in a pre-rehearsal workshop to help playwright Samuel D. Hunter assess his script and respond to preliminary ideas from set designer Misha Kachman. Actress Sarah Marshall, who plays the pivotal role of "Big Hog" (a talking pig) in Jason Grote's *Civilization (all you can eat)*, is participating in design meetings and choreography workshops for the show, as well as research visits to local farms. Actress Jessica Frances Dukes is traveling to Chicago to improvise and rehearse with the cast of The Second City's *Spoiler Alert: Everybody Dies*, helping that venerable company connect their new piece with the themes of Woolly's "apocalyptic" season.

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And actress Kimberly Gilbert will be participating in workshops of Anne Washburn's new play, *Mr. Burns: a post-electric play*. In addition, new Company Member Colin K. Bills is serving on Woolly's script-reading team, evaluating plays for future productions.

"This is a pivotal moment for the company tradition, as many American regional theatres are doing away with it entirely. So in addition to assessing our own experiences, we surveyed colleagues such as Steppenwolf and Dallas Theater Center about how their own companies have evolved and thrived," said Director of Artistic Development Miriam Weisfeld. "We want to head as far away as possible from what frequent Woolly collaborator Mike Daisey characterized in *How Theatre Failed America* as 'freeze-dried theatre,' in which artists based in New York or Los Angeles have become 'migrant workers,' shuttling between theatres throughout the country to create shows in impossibly short periods of time. Instead, we're strengthening our core team of artists so we can plan more projects with them at the center, and so we can grow more sustainable collaborations with new artists who regard our Company and the Washington DC community as the significant resources for theatrical innovation we know they are."

### **ABOUT WOOLLY**

Now in its 32<sup>nd</sup> Season, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company continues to hold its place at the leading edge of American theatre. Acknowledged as "the hottest theatre company in town" (*The Washington Post*), "known for its productions of innovative new plays" (*The New York Times*), Woolly Mammoth is a national leader in the development of new plays, and one of the best known and most influential mid-sized theatres in America.

Woolly's 32<sup>nd</sup> Season features five works that relate to the question, "Does our civilization have an expiration date?" They include Samuel D. Hunter's ***A Bright New Boise*** (Oct 10-Nov 6), The Second City's *Spoiler Alert: Everybody Dies* (Dec 6-Jan 8), Jason Grote's *Civilization (all you can eat)* (Feb 13-Mar 11), Joey Arias and Basil Twist's *Arias with a Twist\** (Apr 4-May 6), and Anne Washburn's *Mr. Burns, a post-electric play* (May 28-July 1).

\*This tour of Basil Twist is made possible by a grant from Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation with support from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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