



MEDIA RELEASE

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Signal Extends 'Old Wicked Songs' Now playing through Dec. 30

CHICAGO, December 10, 2007 — Signal Ensemble Theatre (Ronan Marra, Christopher Prentice and Joseph Stearns, artistic directors) is pleased to announce the extension of its critically lauded staging of ***Old Wicked Songs*** by Jon Marans. The Jeff-recommended production, directed by **Christopher Prentice** and featuring ensemble member **Vincent L. Lonergan** and The House Theatre of Chicago's **Shawn Pfautsch**, will play an additional seven performances **through December 30, 2007** at the Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division.

Old Wicked Songs depicts a clash of cultures and attitudes as a brash American piano prodigy (Pfautsch) travels to Vienna to combat an artistic block that threatens his career. A technically brilliant performer, he studies with a passionate master teacher (Lonergan) who is battling his own demons. The music of Robert Schumann's *Dichterliebe* weaves throughout and binds these men together, melting the stubbornness and denial that surrounds them. *Old Wicked Songs* was a finalist for the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Critical praise for *Old Wicked Songs* includes:

Critic's Choice "Pitch-perfect performances" — Justin Hayford, Chicago Reader

Critic's Pick "A play about classical pianists finding fellowship through art benefits greatly if the actors do their own musical stuntwork. In this smart production by a small treasure of a troupe, they do." — Mary Shen Barnidge, Windy City Times

Critic's Pick — Megan Powell, Time Out Chicago

"Must see" — Centerstage Chicago

"Stellar performances ... One of Five shows to see now" — Dennis Polkow, Newcity Chicago

Old Wicked Songs features designs by **R. Brad Criswell** (scenic), **Laura M. Dana** (costumes), **Sue Ragusa** (lights) and ensemble member **Anthony Ingram** (sound). **Deanna M. Keefe** is the stage manager and ensemble member **Stephanie Ehemann** is the production stage manager.

Jon Marans (Playwright) is the author of *Old Wicked Songs*, which was a 1996 Pulitzer Prize Finalist for Drama winner of the L.A. Drama Logue Award, In England, *Old Wicked Songs* played the Bristol Old Vic and to London's West End at the Gielgud Theater, and starred Bob Hoskins and James Callis. The play has been translated and produced in a dozen countries around the world and was the second most performed new play in the United States in the 1997-98 season. Other produced shows include: *Legacy of the Dragonslayers*, a musical based on Studs Terkel's "Coming of Age" (San Jose Repertory Theatre); *Jumping for Joy* (Laguna Playhouse and Independent Theater in Australia); the musical *Irrationals* (Village Theater in Seattle and in NYC); *A Strange & Separate People* (Penguin Rep in N.Y.). In film, Marans was a story editor/script doctor for Stonebridge, Michael Douglas' production company at Columbia Pictures, instrumental in the development of numerous films. And in TV he was a staff writer/lyricist for the 1991 "New Carol Burnett Show" on CBS and has written for "Cookin' in Brooklyn," a "comedy-reality" show on the Discovery Channel. Marans is a graduate of Duke University in mathematics and music.

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Ensemble member **Christopher Prentice** (Director), Signal's producing artistic director, made his Chicago directorial debut with Conor McPherson's *The Weir* (three Jeff Citation nominations) last season. His work as an actor for the company includes the title role in *Hamlet*, *The Zoo Story*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Landslide*, *Catch-22* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. He was most recently seen in the title role in *Robin Hood* with the Oak Park Festival Theatre. His Chicago credits include *The Three Musketeers* (Chicago Shakespeare); *The Tempest* (First Folio); *Practical Anatomy* (Sansculottes); *Pride and Prejudice* (Northlight); the title roles in *Hamlet* (Velvet Willies) and *Macbeth* (Chase Park); as well as work with Stage Left, Irish Rep, Next, and New Leaf. Regional credits include Milwaukee Rep, American Players Theatre, Dallas Theater Center and Illinois Shakespeare Festival. A native Texan, he holds a B.F.A. in acting from Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

Vincent L. Lonergan (Professor Josef Mashkan) is an ensemble member with Signal where his credits include Polonius in *Hamlet*, Mr. Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer* and Leonato in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Other Chicago credits include Merlin in *The People's Sword in the Stone* (Quest Theatre); *A Wonderful Life* (Porchlight); *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Anna Karenina*, *King Lear* (Vitalist Theatre); *The People's Pinocchio* (Quest Theatre); *Any One Can Whistle* (Pegasus); *The Christmas Schooner* (Bailiwick); *City of Angels* (onetheatre), *Firebugs* (Boxer Rebellion); *Don Juan in Chicago*, *Empress of China*, *Jacques and His Master*, and *Shadow Box* (TinFish); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *A Christmas Carol* (Metropolis). He understudied the role of Robert Wilson in Victory Gardens' production of *Free Man of Color*. Lonergan holds a B.M.E. and an M.M. from Indiana University.

Shawn Pfautsch (Stephen Hoffman) makes his Signal debut. A co-founder of The House Theatre of Chicago, he has appeared in *Hope Springs Infernal*, *The Boy Detective Fails*, the *Valentine* trilogy, *Dave DaVinci Saves the Universe*, *Cave With Man*, *The Terrible Tragedy of Peter Pan* and *Death & Harry Houdini*. As a playwright, his play *Hatfield & McCoy* won two Jeff Citation nominations and his new play *The Attempters* will open at The House this season. Pfautsch has also performed at Emerald City Children's Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre (*Theatrical Essays*) and Strawdog Theatre Company (*Strawdog Radio Theatre VI*). He is a graduate of Southern Methodist University's Meadows School of the Arts.

The **extended performance schedule** begins Sunday, Dec. 16 and continues through Dec. 30 as follows: Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm and Sundays at 3 pm.

The previously announced schedule continues through Dec. 15 as follows: Wednesday at 7:30 pm, Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 8 pm.

Ticket prices are \$20 on Fridays and Saturdays and \$15 on Wednesday, Thursdays and Sundays. Student and senior tickets are \$10. Tickets may be purchased at signalensemble.com or reserved at 773-347-1350. The Chopin Theatre is accessible by the CTA Blue Line train (Division) and buses (70-Division, 56-Milwaukee, 18-Ashland).

Known for its ensemble acting and producing a diverse slate of plays that range from classics to new works, Signal Ensemble Theatre uses the actor as focal point to clearly execute the playwright's vision. Founded by its three artistic directors (Ronan Marra, Christopher Prentice, Joseph Stearns), the company began producing in 2003.

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**Old Wicked Songs
Fact Sheet**

Old Wicked Songs depicts a clash of cultures and attitudes as a brash American piano prodigy travels to Vienna to combat an artistic block that threatens his career. A technically brilliant performer, he studies with a passionate master teacher who is battling his own demons. The music of Robert Schumann's *Dichterliebe* weaves throughout and binds these men together, melting the stubbornness and denial that surrounds them. *Old Wicked Songs* was a finalist for the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Title: **Old Wicked Songs**
Playwright: **Jon Marans**
Directed by: Ensemble member **Christopher Prentice**
Featuring: Ensemble member **Vincent L. Lonergan** (Professor Josef Mashkan) with **Shawn Pfautsch** (Stephen Hoffman).

Location: **Chopin Theatre**, 1543 W. Division, in the Studio

Dates: **Extended run:** December 16–30, 2007
Regular run: Through December 15, 2007

Schedule: **Wednesday:** (12/12 only) 7:30 pm
Thursdays-Saturdays: 8:00 p.m.
Sundays: 7:00 p.m.

Ticket prices: **Fridays and Saturdays,** \$20
Wednesday, Thursdays and Sundays, \$15
Students and Seniors Citizens, \$10
Group rates are available.

Box Office: **Buy online at www.signalensemble.com**
or call 773-347-1350

Notes of Interest:

- *Old Wicked Songs* is the second show in Signal's season of 20th-century American plays, following Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love*.
- *Old Wicked Songs*, a play with music precedes the company's first full musical, *1776*, which will open in January.
- Christopher Prentice (Director) and Shawn Pfautsch (Stephen) worked together on a studio production of *Old Wicked Songs* while studying theater at Southern Methodist University.
- *Old Wicked Songs* marks ensemble member Vincent L. Lonergan's first contemporary performance with the company, after appearing in *Hamlet*, *She Stoops to Conquer* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

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