



MEDIA RELEASE

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Signal tells ghost stories in Conor McPherson's 'The Weir'

Olivier Award winner plays the Chopin Feb. 22 – March 24, 2007

CHICAGO, January 22, 2007 — Signal Ensemble Theatre (Ronan Marra, Christopher Prentice and Joseph Stearns, artistic directors) continues its fourth season with Conor McPherson's Olivier Award-winning ghost-story play **THE WEIR**, directed by Christopher Prentice, running at the Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division, Feb. 22 – March 24, 2007. **Press opening is Saturday, Feb. 24 at 8 p.m.** Tickets may be purchased at signalensemble.com or reserved at 773-347-1350.

Set in a pub in rural Ireland, **THE WEIR** focuses on the bar's regulars and a young Dublin woman newly moved to the area. As the bachelors swap ghostly stories to impress her, she astonishes them with a chilling tale of her own. Both haunting and funny, this eerie play demonstrates the transcendent quality of community and appreciation and the vital need for acceptance.

The cast of **THE WEIR** features ensemble members **Melanie Keller** (Valerie) and **Joseph Stearns** (Brendan) with **Ted Hoerl** (Jack), **Vincent P. Mahler** (Jim) and **John Zinn** (Finbar). (*Please see attached artist profiles.*)

Directed by **Christopher Prentice**, the designers are **Melania Lancy** (set), **Laura M. Dana** (costumes) **Julie E. Ballard** (lights), **Anthony Ingram** (sound), **Devon MacGregor** and **Sarah Elizabeth M.** (props). **Phil Timberlake** is the dialect coach and **Stephanie Ehemann** is the stage manager.

Tony Award nominee **Conor McPherson** (Playwright) was born in Dublin in 1971. He attended the University College in Dublin where he began to write and direct. His plays include *Rum & Vodka*, *The Good Thief*, *This Lime Tree Bower*, *St. Nicholas*, **THE WEIR** (Olivier Award, Best Play), *Dublin Carol*, *Port Authority*, *Shining City* (Tony Award nomination, Best Play) and *The Seafarer*. Film work includes *I Went Down*, *Saltwater*, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and *The Actors*. Other awards include the George Devine Award; Critics' Circle Award; Evening Standard Award; Meyer Whitworth Award; Stewart Parker Award; two Irish Film & Television Academy Best Screenplay Awards; CICA Best Film Award, Berlin Film Festival (*Saltwater*); Best Film and Best Screenplay Awards, San Sebastian Film Festival (*I Went Down*).

THE WEIR will play in the studio at the Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division, Feb. 22-March 24, 2007. Previews are Feb. 22 and 23 at 8 p.m. Opening is Saturday, Feb. 24 at 8 p.m. Regular performances will continue through March 24 as follows: Wednesday (March 21 only), Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. Preview tickets are \$10. Tickets for the regular run are \$10–\$15 and may be purchased online 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).

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Artist Profiles

Ensemble member **Christopher Prentice** (Director), co-founder and producing artistic director of Signal, makes his Chicago directorial debut with THE WEIR. His Signal acting credits include *The Zoo Story*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Landslide*, *Catch-22* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Chicago acting credits include *The Three Musketeers* (Chicago Shakespeare Theater), *The Tempest* (First Folio Shakespeare Festival), *Practical Anatomy* (Sansculottes), *Pride and Prejudice* (Northlight), and work with Next Theatre, Stage Left, Irish Repertory, New Leaf Theatre, Chicago Dramatists and the Velvet Willies. Regional acting credits include American Players Theatre, Milwaukee Rep, Dallas Theater Center and Illinois Shakespeare Festival.

Ted Hoerl (Jack) makes his Signal debut. He last appeared in *Arcadia* at Remy Bumpo Theatre, where he also played Morrison and Peter Shirley in *Major Barbara*. Hoerl has played leads in a number of short features including *Hunter*, *Gone to Sea*, *Dancer*, *The Elephant* and *The Betsy Wetsey Timebomb Effect*, which has been featured in a dozen film festivals around the world. Other work includes *The Sandbox* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Goodman); *A Doll's House*, *The Millionairess*, *Voices from Jerusalem*, and the Jeff Award-winning ensemble of *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been...?* (Next); *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, *The Devil's Disciple*, and *Geneva* (Shaw Chicago); *Incident at Vichy* (Writer's Theatre), which won an After Dark Award for outstanding ensemble; and *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (Organic Touchstone). His reading of *The Fridl* for Stories On Stage will be broadcast on WBEZ in March. Hoerl is an artistic associate at About Face where he appeared as the creepy Dads in *Fascination* and *Dreamboy* (Jeff nomination for outstanding ensemble, Jeff Citation for outstanding production). He teaches in the Theatre Conservatory, Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University, and is the director of the Meisner program at Act One Studio.

Ensemble member **Melanie Keller** (Valerie) has appeared in Signal's *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Landslide* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. She is also an artistic associate with First Folio Shakespeare Festival, where she has appeared in *Private Lives* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Other credits include *The Long Christmas Ride Home* (Next Theatre); *Hamlet* and *King John* (Chicago Shakespeare); *A Christmas Carol* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Metropolis); *The Misanthrope* (BackStage); and productions with Seanachai, Reverie, Breadline, Rising Moon, Shaw Chicago, Powertap, and Lifeline theater companies.

Vincent P. Mahler (Jim) makes his Signal debut. He recently appeared at TimeLine Theatre in *The General from America* and *Guantanamo*, and in Silk Road Theatre Project's *Ten Acrobats in an Amazing Leap of Faith* (After Dark Award, Best New Play). He was artistic director for Frump Tucker Theatre, appearing in *How I Learned to Drive*, *Below the Belt*, and *An Empty Plate in the Cafe du Grand Boeuf*. For Pegasus Players, he performed in *The Lynching of Leo Frank* (Jeff Citation, Best New Play) and the Chicago premiere of *La Bête*. Other credits include roles at Bailiwick, Buffalo Theatre Ensemble, Chicago Jewish Theatre, Circle, Interplay, Irish Repertory, New Tuners, and Seanachai.

Ensemble member **Joseph Stearns** (Brendan), co-founder and managing artistic director of Signal, has appeared in Signal's *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Zoo Story*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Catch-22*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Learning to Fly*. Other Chicago credits include the new musical *Practical Anatomy* (Sansculottes), *The Sleeper* (Theatre 521), *Hamlet*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *As You Like It* (Velvet Willies).

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John Zinn (Finbar) makes his Signal debut. He is the associate artistic director for Uma Productions and his acting credits there include *The Violet Hour*, *The Pool of Bethesda*, *why they invented dancing* (also at the New York Fringe Festival), and *Moment: Three Days of Rain/The Author's Voice*. He has acted at a number of other Chicago and West Coast theaters, including TimeLine, Collaboraction, Artists Repertory Theatre and Tygre's Heart Shakespeare. Film credits include the acclaimed short *The Fifth Horseman*, the independent feature *Into It*, and he has done numerous commercial voice-overs. John has an M.F.A. in Acting from The Theatre School/DePaul University and is the associate director of marketing at Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

About Signal Ensemble Theatre

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. Signal's production of *Seascape* won a Jeff Citation and After Dark Award for best costume design. THE WEIR follows *The Dumb Waiter* & *The Zoo Story* and *Closer* in Signal's fourth season.

Signal's 2006/07 Season at the Chopin Continues

HAMLET

by William Shakespeare
directed by ensemble member Ronan Marra
Chopin Mainstage
April 19 – May 26, 2007

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THE WEIR

FACT SHEET

- WHAT:** Signal Ensemble Theatre presents **THE WEIR** by Conor McPherson
- LOCATION:** Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division St., Chicago, in the Studio
- DATES/TIMES:** THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22 – SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 2007
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| PREVIEWS: 2/22 & 2/23 | 8:00 pm |
| PRESS OPENING: SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24 | 8:00 pm |
| Wednesday eve (3/21 only) | 8:00 pm |
| Thursday, Friday & Saturday eves | 8:00 pm |
| Sunday mats | 3:00 pm |
- DESCRIPTION:** Set in a pub in rural Ireland, THE WEIR focuses on the bar's regulars and a young Dublin woman newly moved to the area. As the bachelors swap ghostly stories to impress her, she astonishes them with a chilling tale of her own. Both haunting and funny, this eerie play demonstrates the transcendent quality of community and appreciation and the vital need for acceptance.
- WHO:** Written by Conor McPherson
Directed by Christopher Prentice
Cast: Ted Hoerl (Jack), Melanie Keller (Valerie), Vincent P. Mahler (Jim), Joseph Stearns (Brendan) and John Zinn (Finbar)
Production: Melania Lancy (setting), Laura M. Dana (costumes), Julie E. Ballard (lights), Anthony Ingram (sound), Devon MacGregor and Sarah Elizabeth M. (props), Phil Timberlake (dialects) and Stephanie Ehemann (stage manager)
- PRICES:** Previews: \$10
Regular run: \$10-\$15
- TICKETS:** INFORMATION/RESERVATIONS: (773) 347-1350 or signalensemble.com

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