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MEDIA RELEASE

Please include in NOVEMBER & DECEMBER calendar listings and announcements

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Pacific Theatre's **THE FARNDALE... CHRISTMAS CAROL** Turns the Usual Holiday Fare On Its Head

IN SHORT: Pacific Theatre's THE FARNDALE... CHRISTMAS CAROL brings the silliest holiday play-within-a-play to the stage with an astoundingly stellar cast, turning the Dickens Christmas classic into a screamingly funny festive travesty!

Opens Dec 2 to Jan 1. For tickets (\$14-\$28) call 604.731.5518 or pacifictheatre.org.

Vancouver, BC – Opens December 2, 2005 to January 1, 2006

Tired of the same old thing for the holidays? Find relief through Pacific Theatre's production of **THE FARNDALE... CHRISTMAS CAROL**, the hilarious play-within-a-play that'll be the comic hit of the season, running December 2 through January 1 at Pacific Theatre in the heart of Vancouver. **Think WAITING FOR GUFFMAN meets Charles Dickens.**

The play's full title is **THE FARNDALE AVENUE HOUSING ESTATE TOWNSWOMEN'S GUILD DRAMATIC SOCIETY'S PRODUCTION OF A CHRISTMAS CAROL**, the eighth in a series of eleven British comedies about a fictional troupe of ladies who reside on Farndale Avenue (they first slaughtered MACBETH in 1976). All of the plays were written by David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jr., who became inspired after seeing McGillivray's mother in a production put on by an all woman cast.

"Say 'Humbug.' No, not handbag, humbug... Not bad. Are you about a 38-inch bust?" says Mrs. Reece, desperate for someone who'll play Ebenezer Scrooge. This stalwart group of lady thespians brings ineptitude to new heights with their dizzily endearing, well-meaning assault on the Dickens Christmas classic.

This festive farcical romp features the comic talents of Erla Faye Forsyth as Mrs. Reece (the troupe's ringleader who plays Tiny Tim) and Trish Pattenden as Thelma (the prima donna Scrooge), together again to butt heads on the Pacific Theatre stage (they co-starred in LETTICE AND LOVAGE in 2002).

They are joined by Julia Mackey as the ancient and failing Mercedes, Christy-Lynne Guthrie as the neurotic Felicity, and the Sam Payne Award-winning Kyle Rideout, cross-dressing again after spending a summer in skirts at Bard On The Beach; he plays Gordon, the guild's reluctant stage manager who's forced to play Mrs. Cratchit.

THE FARNDALE... CHRISTMAS CAROL is directed by the solid and silly Kerry VanderGriend (who directed the hit comedy CHICKENS at Pacific Theatre in 2004), with musical direction by Kirsten Waldschmidt, set design by Francesca Albertazzi, costume design by Nicole Bach, lighting design by Erin Harris, and sound design by Spencer Capier, it's sure to be a screamingly funny festive travesty.

"My mother had been in her drama group for years," co-author McGillivray has said. "I always remember seeing her in shows with women playing men's parts, and doing it dreadfully. But throughout it all was the fun and drive they had, no matter what problem beset them."

A review by The Independent captures the essence of **THE FARNDALE... CHRISTMAS CAROL**: "A classic dramatic massacre with an awesome, convincing idiocy that entralls — despite one's better judgment."

Details:	THE FARNDALE... CHRISTMAS CAROL by David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin, Jr.
When:	Opens Dec 2, 2005 to Jan 1, 2006 (Preview Dec 1), Wed.-Sat. at 8pm / Sat. at 2pm
Where:	Pacific Theatre , 1420 West 12 th Ave (at Hemlock), Vancouver, BC
Tickets:	\$14 - \$28 - To reserve call 604.731.5518, or visit pacifictheatre.org, or in person.

Images available at pacifictheatre.org/press.html or contact Steve for a **broadcast-quality video**.

THE FARNDALE... CHRISTMAS CAROL Playnotes

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of A Christmas Carol is the eighth in a series of eleven British comedies about a fictional troupe of ladies who reside on Farndale Avenue. All of the plays were devised and written by David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin, Jr., who became inspired after seeing McGillivray's mother in a production put on by an all woman cast.

"My mother had been in her drama group for years," co-author McGillivray has said. "I always remember seeing her in shows with women playing men's parts, and doing it dreadfully. But throughout it all was the fun and drive they had, no matter what problem beset them."

The first evidence of this familial inspiration, **The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of Macbeth** debuted at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1975. The audiences howled with delight and McGillivray and Zerlin saw their opportunity to continue the misadventures of their Farndale ladies, which has continued to be performed worldwide for thirty years now.

In an introduction to one of the plays McGillivray writes, "I think it's no accident that the Farndale Ladies, who can't seem to perform the simplest task without falling over or breaking something, were created in Great Britain, possibly the only country in the world which discourages personal achievement as vulgar and has made cult out of the heroic failure. Coarse acting, bad movies, and botched out-takes had a loyal following in the British Isles long before the rest of the world recognized their entertainment value, and when Walter Zerlin, Jr. and I decided to make our mark on the Edinburgh Festival in 1975, it was perhaps inevitable that our production of **Macbeth**, in which the set was accidentally erected back-to-front and an incapacitated witch was pushed round the cauldron in a wheelchair, was an award-winning sell-out, later touring the country to similar acclaim for the next year.

"Such was the impact of the Farndale Ladies that they had to make comeback after comeback. Since the Farndale Avenue plays were first published twenty-nine years ago, they've proved surprisingly popular all over the world. It seems that, although the Townswomen's Guild, a group of mainly middle-class housewives who meet to learn skills and raise funds for charity, is uniquely British, there are equivalents, such as Countrywomen's

Associations and Leagues of Women, in many other countries. With only minor adaptations made to the scripts, audiences are now taking that age-old, vicarious pleasure in misfortune throughout Europe and as far afield as Saudi Arabia, Zambia, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

"You may think that no actors could possibly be as unmitigatedly awful as the Farndale Ladies. Perhaps they couldn't. But," McGillivray concludes, "if they did exist, they'd come from Britain."

The Farndale Ladies (and Gordon) have a wide range oeuvre which includes: **The Farndale Follies** (1978), **The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery** (1980), the French farce **Chase Me Up Farndale Avenue, Si'l Vous Plait** (1982), another spine-chilling mystery titled **The Haunted Nook at Farndale Castle** (1984), a revised version of the original murder mystery (1986), the sci-fi thriller **They Came From Mars and Landed Outside the Farndale Avenue Church Hall in Time for the Townswomen's Guild's Coffee Morning** (1987), the Dickens Christmas travesty (1988), a 1930s musical comedy set on a luxury ocean liner called **We Found Love and an Exquisite Set of Porcelain Figurines aboard the S.S. Farndale Avenue** (1990), their homage to Gilbert and Sullivan named **The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Operatic Society's Production of The Mikado** (1991), and Peter Pan—the eleventh play to be desecrated by Farndale ineptitude, complete with flying actors—due for publication this year.

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Cast & Crew Biographies

*Appears courtesy of Canadian Actor's Equity Association

Kerry van der Griend*

Director

It thrills Kerry to work with such talented cast, crew, and staff at Pacific Theatre, where he has been involved for almost ten years as an actor, director, and board member. Most recently he directed four chickens, two humans, and a three-piece band in Pacific Theatre's 2004 hit comedy, *Chickens*. Kerry trained at the National Theatre Conservatory in Denver, Colorado, and has performed in regional venues from the Richmond Gateway to Bard on the Beach. He also teaches at Trinity Western University. Thank you Donna-Lea, Emmett, and Lily for your support, encouragement, and inspiration.

Erla Faye Forsyth*

Mrs. Reece

Erla Faye is delighted to be back on the Pacific Theatre stage for her 10th production in the Black Box. Recent Pacific Theatre credits include *Lettice and Lovage* and *Holy Mo*. She has also played in *Marvin's Room* (Chemainus Theatre), *Twelfth Night* and *Fire* (The Globe Theatre), *Regina* and *The Number 14* (Axis/Touchstone Theatre). Erla Faye and Dave attempt to homeschool their three daughters and boast the messiest house in Abbotsford.

Christy-Lynne Guthrie

Felicity

Christy-Lynne is thrilled to be back on stage and out of the Box Office, as she finishes the home stretch of her Pacific Theatre apprenticeship. She was last seen in PT's Second Stage production of *Hamlet* and on the Main Stage in *Ten November*. A recent graduate from the theatre program at Trinity Western University, Christy-Lynne's stage credits there include: *The Lesson*, *Mail Order Bride*, *Defying Gravity* and *Dr. Prescription's Variety Hour: Part 1*. While she has no clue what the future holds, she has the most amazing person by her side to experience it with. Thanks to everyone who has provided inspiration and support through this crazy ride of theatre. Love to family and Tom.

Julia Mackey*

Mercedes

After spending a golden summer in Barkerville BC, Julia returned home to dive into the laugh filled days that were spent creating this wacky version of the Dicken's Classic. This is Julia's fourth PT show following *Mercy Wild*, *Private Eyes* and her Jessie nominated performance in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Merry Christmas to all and much love to Dirk, Beckett, Walker and newborn nephew, Ben – the best early Christmas present ever - and Mum; thank you for being there.

Trish Pattenden*

Thelma

PT audiences will remember Trish from *Lettice and Lovage*, for which she received a Jessie nomination. Since then she performed in *The Front Page* and sold out shows with *Whacked!* sketch comedy. Trish also appeared in *The Number 14*, *The Occupation of Heather Rose*, *Dancing At Lughnasa* and a groovy version of *The Women*. She's also written and performed a one-woman boffo show - *From Here to Maternity*. And now... on stage again! Bliss! rupture!

Kyle Rideout*

Gordon

Kyle is excited to be back at Pacific Theatre. Some past credits include *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (Bard on the Beach); *Night Light* (Green Thumb); *Beggars at the Waters of Immortality* (Dumb Prophet Productions); *Halo* (Pacific Theatre); *Treasure Island* (Carousel Theatre); *Quicken*, *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Trelawny of the Wells*, *Hamlet*, *End of the Game*, and *The Laramie Project* (Studio 58). Next, he will be performing in *Studies in Motion: the Hauntings of Eadward Muybridge*. Kyle is a graduate of Studio 58.

Francesca Albertazzi

Set Designer

Francesca is a graduate of UBC. She has been working as a set and costume designer with many Vancouver companies over the past few years. Some recent credits as costume designer include: *Summer*

and *Smoke* (In the Company of Productions), for which she was nominated for a Jessie Richardson Award, *Buz Gem Blues* (Firehall) and *Il Campiello* (UBC). As set designer, her credits include: *The Bond* (Pound of Flesh), *Oedipus The King* (Douglas College), *Il Campiello* (UBC), *The Fall* (Electric Co.), and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (UBC). Upcoming projects include *FOURPLAY* for Studio 58 and *MacBeth* for Pound of Flesh Theatre Company. She has also designed two exhibitions at the Vancouver Museum, both currently open to the public.

Nicole Bach
Costume Designer

Nicole is happy to be starring in the role of "Mrs. Cavendish", Wardrobe Mistress for The Farndale Dramatic Society, and she hopes that "some of the costumes look like real clothes." Some past costume design credits for PT include *Shadowlands*, *Last Train to Nibroc*, *Halo* and *Ten November*. Her costume designs for the PT production *Chickens*, also directed by Kerry Van Der Griend, were nominated for a Jessie Richardson Award. She feels honoured to be working with Kerry again, as well as all of the other wonderful actors, designers and staff that brought this show to life. Nicole is resident costume designer for the Trinity Western University Drama Department and she has a BFA in theatre from UBC.

Spencer Capier
Sound Designer

Spencer has been playing and producing music in Vancouver and around the world for nearly twenty years. He is most often found touring with recording artist Carolyn Arends, winner of the West Coast Music Awards Songwriter of the year and the American Dove Awards. When not on the road or in the studio with Carolyn, he has worked extensively with Pacific Theatre as an actor, musician, Musical Director, and now, Sound Designer. He has played on hundreds of albums, working in studios in Vancouver, Nashville, and Los Angeles, and has recently been making a name for himself as a producer.

Erin Harris
Lighting Designer

Erin is a Vancouver based lighting designer who recently graduated from the University of British Columbia. Earning a Bachelors' degree in Technical Theatre and Design promoted her constantly growing love of lighting for theatre. Earlier this year, she had the opportunity to work as a lighting design assistant on The Playhouse's production of *Copenhagen*. Lighting design credits include: *Measure for Measure* (Theatre at UBC), *Falsettos* (Sky Corner Productions), *Crossing* (Random Productions and Esdecy Arts copresentation), *Chickens* (Pacific Theatre) and *I Am Yours* (Defiant Theatre Company and Presentation House copresentation). Thanks go to Teachers, Friends, Family, Alishia, and Hez.

Connie Hosie*
Stage Manager

Connie is pleased to be making her PT debut. A graduate of UVic, Connie spent a season as ASM for the Belfry (Victoria). She was Resident SM at Chemainus for 3 years when she made the move to Vancouver with her husband, Grayson. Connie works in Film, TV and Theatre, but her passion continues to be stage management. Past show favourites include: *SUDS: The Musical* (Arts Club), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (CTF), and *Two* (Belfry).

Kirsten Waldschmidt
Musical Director

Kirsten is delighted to have worked on this show. In the last year she composed, produced and performed *Seed Life* (a concert of new music for chamber ensemble and women's choir), her Arts Thesis for her masters degree from Regent College. This summer Kirsten co-produced *Pilgrim Path* with Donna Dinsmore (a CD of music from the Regent community). She has a BMus in composition from U of C, a special friend named Sicily, and a cute husband.

Artistic Director's Notes

Welcome!

To a Really Dumb Play, with absolutely no Redeeming Value.

When Pacific Theatre first got started, I was a particularly earnest young Artistic Director (though I wouldn't accept the title for several years – I preferred "comrade," if I remember correctly). Theatre was meant to change the world, or at least transform a few hearts. Meaningful. Significant. Not Funny.

We put up an anthology piece to showcase the kind of shows we hoped someday to stage, a "Backstage Tour" of our company's plans and hopes. I'm not sure how *The Skit* snuck in there amidst all that Significance, but there was one utterly silly bit, something about bringing a volunteer onstage and subjecting them to the actor's nightmare. Pretty darn funny. But I had no idea it would also be a sort of revelation for moi.

A friend (a hero) of mine showed up one night, a woman who had paid plenty of dues setting up free daycare and a community network for single mothers. Somebody who was Making A Difference In The Real World. And even now I remember what that silly semi-improv schtick did to her. For her. In her.

To say she laughed wouldn't come close. She exploded, she howled, she shrieked, she wept out tears of pure enjoyment. Which isn't so very far from joy. I saw her after the show, and she looked like a new person – she'd been transported, healed up, cleansed. By our stupid little skit. I was astonished. At the power of a good laugh.

So here we are again. In the middle of a season of thoughtful, significant, meaningful works that explore the realities of human experience... A really dumb play, with no redeeming value. Except the redeeming value of a belly laugh. Which, these days, seems plenty redeeming to us.

Ron Reed,
Artistic Director

Director's Notes

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of A Christmas Carol: A Comedy. The title itself elicits at least a chuckle, a raised eyebrow. It is certainly more than a mouthful, and it got me wondering: what makes these ladies tick? The answer to that question became the principle that guided us through rehearsals: how would the Farndale ladies have done it?

My first encounter with Farndale left me giddy, shaking my head, even breathless with laughter. There exists an implicit mindset from the ladies, a way of doing things that not necessarily fits the norm of theatre practice. They are amateurs, after all, but extremely serious about pulling off a play. Certain elements of putting on a production naturally caught the ladies' attention; others were completely overlooked. The result is a rollicking presentation of Farndale's finest, in all their great perplexity and glory.

It humbles me to be working with such talent: producing staff, designers, technicians, and performers. I encouraged all involved to learn to think like Farndale ladies for the duration. I invite you to do the same. There are no brain surgeons in the cast, no grand catharsis, no epic, dramatic denouement, but what better thing to do in the chilly months of the solstice than to play. I hope you will. You are, after all, the final "character" in the play, and in every play. Feedback from the audience shapes the story, the production, and the performance perhaps more than you know. So play heartily. Enjoy. Just don't sit back, or you're liable to miss all the fun. Or, if you're not careful, get dragged up onto the stage!

Kerry van der Griend
Director

Helpful Hints for THE FARNDALE... CHRISTMAS CAROL

Farndale Avenue – ubiquitous British street name, with locations in London, Derbyshire, Kingston upon Hull, North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, Staffordshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands, and York.

Charles Dickens' novel A CHRISTMAS CAROL – probably best known now as a story exploited by Hollywood repeatedly in straight adaptations (Disney's included) and altered versions such as the Bill Murray comedy *Scrooged*. Regardless of how it is now known it is certainly well known, and its anti-hero Scrooge represents curmudgeonly and stingy attitudes outside the context of the book. It was published a Christmas book in 1843 and is quite a simple tale but successful for that reason. Scrooge is avaricious, misanthropic and heartless, showing no feeling for the Christmas spirit. After he is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Marley, he sees visions of his past, present and future that inspire him to become a zealously kind and amiable individual who sends a turkey to his clerk Bob Cratchit and gives to Christmas charities generously. It is a somewhat saccharine tale and is not one of Dickens' finer works but the story itself is heartening and is a proposed alternative to the grim and stern Puritan values of the Victorian age.

Frankie Vaughan – legendary crooner who died at the age of 71 in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire in 1999, dubbed "Mr Moonlight" after one of his hits, Give Me The Moonlight, died in the early hours at his home.

Dartmoor – a National Park in the centre of the English county of Devon, in the southwest of England. It encompasses an area of 368 square miles of Devon's most beautiful moorland, countryside and villages and its High Moor is one of the last true wilderness to be found in England today. Dartmoor's unique blend of features shows human occupation spanning a period

of some 5,000 years coupled with both mystical enchantment and breath taking beauty.

Beetle Drive – British game in which six people sit at a table and a dice is thrown by each person in turn. Each person has a card on which they have to draw in the beetle as they throw the relevant number. Each number on the dice represents a different part of the beetle. The player has to throw a 6 followed by a 5 which then gives them a body and a head. They can then get the rest of the beetle's body parts in any order. The first person to complete their beetle calls out and the game stops. Everyone adds up their score for that beetle and the highest score on each table moves clockwise to the next table and the lowest score moves anti-clockwise to the next table. At the end of the set number of games (usually 12) everyone adds up their scores for all the games and the highest score wins and the lowest score gets the 'booby prize'.

Hunt the Thimble – (also known as *Hide the Thimble*, and *I Spy*) One child sends all the others from the room, after which he places the thimble in an inconspicuous place in plain sight. He then calls the others into the room, and they begin to search for the thimble. As each one sees the thimble he says, "I spy" and sits down. If it is rather difficult to find, the one who hid it says "warm" when a searcher is near the thimble and "cold" when he goes away from it. After all have found it, the one who first saw it has the privilege of hiding it.

Curling Tongs – British for "curling iron"

Pesetas – the currency of Spain.

Marbella – Mediterranean vacation destination in southern Spain

Belgravia – London neighbourhood just southwest of Buckingham Palace

The Guides – nickname for the Girl Guide

PACIFIC THEATRE – About Us

Pacific Theatre was founded in Vancouver in 1984 as a professional theatre company which aims to delight, provoke, entertain and engage its audience by presenting stories that explore the spiritual aspects of human experience in a non-propagandist way that respects all faith orientations, and which strives to operate with artistic, spiritual, relational and financial integrity.

We're a member of the Greater Vancouver Professional Theatre Alliance, the Alliance For Arts & Culture and a supporting member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres. To date we've produced 58 shows, including 19 premieres, such as ESPRESSO by Lucia Frangione, and received over 50 Jessie Award nominations. And in June, 2004, Pacific Theatre was voted "ONE OF VANCOUVER'S FAVOURITE LIVE THEATRES" in the Stars of Vancouver Readers' Choice Awards, Vancouver Courier (along with the Arts Club and The Vancouver Playhouse).