



2015-2016
Season



Press Release

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CBT-Commissioned World Premiere of “The Open Hand” in Clarence Brown Theatre’s Lab Theatre

The world premiere of the CBT-commissioned “The Open Hand,” written by Robert Caisley and directed by Producing Artistic Director Calvin MacLean, will be performed in the Clarence Brown Theatre’s Lab Theatre March 30 to April 17, 2016. Lab Theatre performances sell out quickly. Patrons are encouraged to purchase tickets quickly as this premiere is not to be missed! A Pay What You Wish Preview performance will be held Wednesday, March 30, a talk back with the cast will take place Sunday, April 10 following the matinee, and the Open Captioned performance is Sunday, April 17 at 2:00 pm. Support for this production was provided by Jennifer Banner, Debbie and Jeff Chapman, and Townes Lavidge Osborn. Media sponsors are WUOT, WUTK, and The Daily Beacon.

“The Open Hand” is a satire on our discomfort with generosity. Suppose someone is overly generous to you... offering something you couldn’t possibly repay. Do you reject their generosity and risk offending them? Or do you accept the gift and then stew over what might be demanded in return? The new play ventures into this territory with wit and bite observing the contemporary anxieties between those with means and those with hopes, dreams and disappointment. The production contains adult themes and strong language.

“It has always been my ambition for the CBT to produce and develop new plays. The presence of an MFA program in Acting provides a rare opportunity: to commission a playwright to work with our students over an extended period of time on the development of a new play written expressly for them,” said MacLean.

In 2013, Caisley met with the MFA Acting students in their first year of study to discuss ideas and research issues associated with a play on the theme of generosity. He then returned to his home in Idaho to write a draft of the new play based on those discussions and his familiarity with the talents of the students. MacLean then worked with Caisley over the next six months, reading scenes, discussing possible events, and suggesting certain casting possibilities.

Caisley returned to UT’s campus in 2014 to read the draft and adjust it based on the responses of the students. Finally, by the summer of 2015 a production draft was submitted for MacLean to begin work with the designers who also are students in the MFA Design program. Caisley will be in residence at the CBT during the rehearsal process.

“When the play finally opens before an audience these students will have enjoyed the experience of designing the first production, of being the original cast, and of finding much of themselves in the characters, action, and stage environment of a new play,” MacLean said.

Calvin MacLean (Director) is the CBT Producing Artistic Director and UT Theatre Department Head. CBT productions include: “The Threepenny Opera,” “A Flea in Her Ear,” “The Life of Galileo,” “The Secret Rapture,” “A Streetcar Named Desire” (with Dale Dickey), “Amadeus” (with the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra), “Kiss Me, Kate,” “Sweeney Todd” (with the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra and Dale Dickey), and “Our Country’s Good.” Previously Head of Directing at Illinois State University, he also was the Artistic Director of the Illinois Shakespeare Festival for 11 seasons. Professionally active in Chicago, his productions – mostly at the Famous Door Theatre – earned several prestigious Joseph Jefferson Awards for Outstanding Production and Outstanding Direction.

Playwright **Robert Caisley** is Professor of Theatre and Head of Dramatic Writing at the University of Idaho. His plays have been performed across the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. His last play, “Happy,” first presented at the 2011 National New Play Network Annual Showcase of New Plays at InterACT Theatre in Philadelphia, was a 2012 Finalist for both the prestigious Eugene O’Neill Theatre Center’s New Play Conference and the Woodward/Newman Award for Drama at Bloomington Playwrights Project. “Happy” was nominated for a 2014 Bay Area Critics Circle Award for Best Original Script, won the 2014 SOTA Award for Best Play in Northern California and the 2014 Broadway World New Jersey Theatre Award for Best New Work.

The cast is comprised of UT Theatre MFA candidates Steve Sherman (Jack), Kyle Maxwell (Todd), Melissa David (Freya) and Lindsay Nance (Allison) and a visiting guest artist Roderick Peeples.

Roderick Peeples, who will perform the role of David Nathan Brian, calls Chicago home. He last appeared at the CBT as Peachum in “The Threepenny Opera.” Previous CBT credits are “Amadeus” and “The Life of Galileo.” In Chicago, where he has been awarded the prestigious Joseph Jefferson Award, he has performed at Chicago Shakespeare, Goodman, Steppenwolf, Bumpo, Victory Gardens, Famous Door, Court, and Next theatres. He also has performed in regional theatres across the country. Film and television credits include: Robert Altman’s “The Company,” “Road to Perdition,” “Novocaine,” “The Hudsucker Proxy,” “Prison Break,” “ER,” “Early Edition,” and the “Untouchables.”

The creative team for the production includes: UT MFA candidates **Tannis Kapell** (Lighting Design) and **Nevena Prodanovic** (Scenic/Media Design); UT faculty **Marianne Custer** (Costume Design); visiting guest artist **Rick Peeples** (Sound Design); and UT Theatre students **Sara Oldford** (Assistant Director), **Alex Ross** (Stage Manager) and **Caleb Cooper** (Assistant Stage Manager) and **David Greenberg** (Assistant Sound Design).

Two Previews for “The Open Hand” are Wednesday, March 30 and Thursday, March 31 followed by Opening Night Friday, April 1. The production runs through April 17. For tickets, call the Clarence Brown Theatre box office at 865-974-5161, Tickets Unlimited at 865-656-4444 or order online 24/7 at www.clarencebrowntheatre.com

With a dual mission to train the next generation of theatre artists and to provide top quality professional theatre, the Clarence Brown Theatre at the University of Tennessee Knoxville is one of only 13 academic LORT (League of Resident Theatre) institutions in the nation. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Calvin MacLean and Managing Director David B. Byrd, the CBT season runs from August through May and features nine productions ranging from musicals to drama.

The CBT provides a cultural resource for both the university and the larger East Tennessee community and affirms diversity and inclusivity in all their forms.

The 2015/2016 season concludes with “South Pacific.” For more information or tickets, call the CBT Box Office at 865-974-5161 or visit us online at <http://clarencebrowntheatre.com/>. Stay connected to the Clarence Brown

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