



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 26, 2007

### Cornish Theater & Performance Production Departments Present *The Beggar's Opera*

SEATTLE, WA – Cornish Theater and Performance Production Departments present a contemporary adaptation of John Gay's classic musical, *The Beggar's Opera*. Replacing the baroque sounds of the original musical production, however, will be the pop tunes of the 1980s. Lisa Norman, who directs the production, has created this new contemporary adaptation in an effort to make this important play in theatrical history more appealing and interesting to students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

April 26-28, 8 pm and April 28, 2 pm

#### **The Beggar's Opera**

Lisa Norman, Director

Megan Smithling, Dramaturg

Juliet Waller Pruzan, Choreographer

Gretta Harley, Music Director

Broadway Performance Hall, 1625 Broadway, Seattle

Tickets: \$8.00 general; \$5.00 students, alumni and seniors

For tickets contact Ticket Window at (206) 325.6500, [www.ticketwindowonline.com](http://www.ticketwindowonline.com) or at Ticket

Window box offices located at Pacific Place, Broadway Market, Pike Place Market, Bellevue's

Meydenbauer Center

#### **About The Beggar's Opera**

*The Beggar's Opera* was written in 1728 by John Gay, famously known as the father of musical theater. The story, written as a "play within a play" by the character of the Beggar, features the highwayman Captain Macheath and sweet Polly Peachum, daughter of the leader of the London criminal underground. Macheath's weakness for women eventually leads to betrayal by one of his many lovers and the story goes on to address social inequity through comparisons between the lower and upper classes. In *The Beggar's Opera*, John Gay took recognizable popular ballads of the day and changed the lyrics to satirize the government and exemplify the social norms separating society's haves and have-nots.

#### **About the Contemporary Adaptation**

In this contemporary adaptation, Cornish theater students will use the script of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, but the original music will be replaced with the sounds of the 1980s – in a sense, doing the same thing John Gay did in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by changing the words of popular tunes to enhance his storyline. In creating the adaptation, Lisa Norman drew upon the many parallels between the materialism of 18<sup>th</sup> century London of Gay's original work and the self indulgence evident throughout the 1980s in the United States. It was the 80s that brought MTV and the modern day romantic highwaymen; bad boys and girls such as Madonna, Michael Jackson, Boy George and Prince whose work reeked of narcissistic 'Look at me!' manifestations. The rise of homelessness and trickle-down economics in the 80s showed similar juxtapositions of rich and poor that *The Beggar's Opera* so clearly distinguishes.

Another widely known contemporary adaptation of *The Beggar's Opera* is Bertolt Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper* (or, *The Threepenny Opera*, as it's known in English) which premiered in Berlin in 1928. It was in this rendition that the popular song *Mack the Knife* first premiered and this is today, a standard in pop music.

### **About Lisa Norman**

Lisa Norman has acted, produced and directed in regional theatre for over 25 years, with such companies as the Clarence Brown Theatre Co., Nashville Shakespeare Company, and Tennessee Rep, to name a few. Roles have included leads in *Dangerous Liaisons*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Hamlet*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, and *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Film and television appearances have included *Matlock*, Disney's *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken*, and most recently, *Our Very Own*, for which she also served as the dialect coach. She has also worked on-camera and as a voice-over artist in many national commercials and industrials. Norman has taught acting and voice at Marymount Manhattan College in NYC, University of South Carolina, University of Tennessee and is currently teaching voice and speech as an adjunct instructor at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. Norman received her MFA in Acting from the University of Tennessee and additional training includes the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and Shakespearean text with Cicely Berry of the RSC. She is a theatre consultant for Arts Impact, an arts-in-education program and is also a member of AEA, SAG and AFTRA.

### **About Megan Smithling**

Megan Smithling, dramaturg and teaching artist, has collaborated locally with Strawberry Theatre Workshop, Seattle Repertory Theatre, ACT, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Book-It Repertory Theatre and Tacoma Actors Guild. She has worked with Hampshire Shakespeare Company in Massachusetts and for Hartford Stage Company in Connecticut. Currently, she teaches dramaturg and research methods at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle and is the program associate at Theatre Puget Sound.

### **About Juliet Waller Pruzan**

Juliet Waller Pruzan, dancer, choreographer and playwright, has lived in Seattle since 1992. Previous choreography for the Cornish College Theater Department includes *A Mouth Full of Birds* (1998) and *Trojan Women* (2000). Pruzan has danced with such notables as Amii LeGendre (1992-2002), Mary Sheldon Scott (1997-2000) and Laura Curry (2004). Her work appears regularly in Seattle, most recently in *10 Tiny Dances* and *Butt Rock Suites*. Her play, *Avalanche* (co-written with Bret Fetzer) was published in *The Kenyon Review* (Fall 2006) and her first full length play *Told You Once, Told You a Hundred Times* premiered at the Chamber Theater last spring.

### **About Gretta Harley**

Gretta Harley is the Composer in Residence and Music Director for the Cornish College of the Arts Theater Department in Seattle. At Cornish she has worked on *Measure for Measure*, *Mail Order Bride*, *Tales From Ovid*, *Peer Gynt* and *Twelfth Night*. Gretta was also Music Director and band member for Sarah Rudinoff's *Last Year's Kisses*, and the Tribes Project's, *Dreams About Teeth*. In addition to teaching at Cornish, she teaches private music lessons, plays rock and classical music and enjoys harmonic singing.

### **About Cornish College of the Arts**

Cornish College of the Arts provides aspiring artists with the educational opportunities to become professionals in their fields. The College offers Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees in Art, Dance, Design, Performance Production and Theater, and a Bachelor of Music degree. It is one of three private colleges in the United States focusing on both the performing and visual arts, and the only college of its kind in the Northwest. The College is accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design and has a national reputation for its faculty, curriculum, and student performance and exhibition opportunities.

Since its founding by Nellie Cornish in 1914, Cornish College of the Arts has contributed to the nation's cultural and intellectual heritage through its alumni and faculty. Historically, these figures include choreographers and dancers Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, Syvilla Fort and Bonnie Bird; composer John Cage; painters Mark Tobey, William Cumming, and William Ivey; photographer Imogen Cunningham; educator Calvin B. Cady and broadcaster Chet Huntley, to name just a few. More recently these figures are joined by Brendan Fraser (film actor), Patrick Haskett (painter), Steve Jenson (sculptor), Paul Owen Lewis (illustrator), Lois Rathvon McCarter (dancer/choreographer), Eyvind Kang (violinist/composer), Jarrad Powell and Joshua Kohl (composers). And, the College continues to represent the Northwest's largest concentration of professional artists dedicated to instruction.

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