

Evanston Mainstay Announces 2015/16 Season

Showcases of daring new work, deadly laser fields, and friendships spanning generations are featured in the 2015-16 season from The Actors Gymnasium. "We are thrilled to be collaborating with exciting new artists and designers to bring the worlds of circus and theater together in a whole new way," says Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi, Artistic Director.

A new work directed by House Theatre's Chris Mathews brings Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi out of retirement to perform in the annual winter circus with long time collaborator David Catlin. *The Long-Awaited Debut of Marnie & Phil: A Circus Love Letter* also features Samuel Taylor and Lindsey Noel Whiting and explores the relationships we form when we're young, how those stay with us, grow over time, recede, and come back together. For the Fall Youth Circus, Buzz22 Chicago's Alex Tey and Sara Sawicki bring us a noir-infused Mission Impossible style thrill ride in *Secrets, Lies, and Super Spies*. The season also includes three showcases of new work which cement Chicago's reputation as the epicenter of contemporary circus, including the new showcase for the inaugural class of Professional Circus Training Program students.

"The Actors Gymnasium develops multidisciplinary artists who are able to engage their bodies, voices, and performance training to attain new levels of theatrical expression," DiStasi states, "The process for creating our shows usually begins with creative brainstorming, and embraces the strengths of each unique cast member or designer. We try to develop an atmosphere where artists can do their most remarkable work. The key, of course, is to start with very imaginative and talented people. This year, with folks like Chris Mathews, Sara Sawicki, Alex Tey and Dean Evans, it should be an extremely exciting season of circus-theatre exploration."

Performance and circus artist from around Chicago come together to the delight of audiences of all ages: Amanda Crockett appears at The Actors Gymnasium for the first time with a hat juggling act as well as Vanessa Valliere with her clowning and puppetry act. Plucky Rosenthal will perform a musical variety act, Courtney Prokopas on pulley. Local studio Cocodaco Dance Project will take the stage as well as Silent Theatre Company. NECCA grad and circus coach Tommy Tomlins will be performing on the silks and many many more.

Tickets are \$15 and available now for the 4:30 pm matinee and the 7:30 pm evening performances. Two Performances Only.

Leading a double-life can be tough, especially when all of your friends are doing it too! Join the world's finest secret agents, who have no idea that their civilian best friends are actually their colleagues until a power-mad villain plots to turn them against each other. Will their friendship prevail or will the secrets and lies destroy them all? This mission-should you choose to accept it- includes: espionage, acrobatics, live rock music, comedic spyjinx, and DEADLY LASERS!

The Long-Awaited Debut of Marnie & Phil

A Circus Love Letter

Written/Directed by Chris Mathews

Featuring Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi, David Catlin, Lindsey Noel Whiting, & Samuel Taylor

February 13 - March 20, 2016

Opening Night Gala February 13, 2016, 7:30 pm

Press Night February 14, 2016, 3:00 pm

Through the spectacular circus wizardry of The Actors Gymnasium, *The Long-Awaited Debut of Marnie & Phil: A Circus Love Letter* tells a time-spanning, multi-generational story that explores how our friendships stay with us over time, recede, and can come back to save us just when we need them to. Marnie and Phil met when they were just young circus students, and became instant friends. But when the inevitable twists and turns of fate take them separate ways, they make a promise to always write to each other no matter where they are. As they each somersault through adventures of fame and heartache, and age begins to take its toll on their once nimble physiques, they seek each other out to perform one last show--their long-awaited debut!

A new, original work of circus theatre, *The Long-Awaited Debut of Marnie & Phil: A Circus Love Letter* will be written and directed by Chris Mathews (ensemble member of The House Theatre of Chicago), and features a cast of Actors Gymnasium favorites including Lindsey Noel Whiting (Alice in *Lookingglass Alice*, *Lost & Found*, *The Magical Exploding Boy* and *The Invisible Circus*), David Catlin (founding ensemble member of Lookingglass), Samuel Taylor (*Lookingglass Alice*, *Back Room Shakespeare Project*), and AG Artistic Director Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi, as well as the premier students of the Actors Gymnasium Teen Ensemble.

The show will feature original songs by Whiting and music by award-winning Chicago composer Kevin O'Donnell (The House Theatre of Chicago, Andrew Bird), as well as lighting design from Maggie Fullilove-Nugent (The Hypocrites, The Ruffians). Jaw-dropping circus choreography will be led by Artistic Director Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi.

The Actors Gymnasium Winter Circus will participate for a fourth year in the League of Chicago Theatres' Chicago Theatre Week February 11-21.

Spring Youth Circus

Circus Choreography by Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi

May 14, 15, 21, 22, 2016

The Youth Circus is a performance-based training program that culminates in a fully-produced, original show. This intensive experience includes high-quality training in drama, dance and circus arts - not to mention invaluable personal and interpersonal skills. The Youth Circus is one of The Actors Gymnasium's most popular events each year.

Professional Circus Training Program Showcase

Directed by Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi

May 28 & 29, 2016

The Actors Gymnasium proudly presents the premiere performance of our inaugural Professional Training Program. After training intensely for 9 months, 27 hours a week, 5 days a week, our Pro Training students from across the country will showcase their work in Circus Arts, Physical Theatre, and Performing Arts. You don't want to miss these amazing, talented artists!

Summer Circus Intensive Showcase

Directed by Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi

July 23 & 24, 2016

Thirty artists debut new acts that they have developed throughout six weeks of intensive training in high-level physical performance and circus skills. One weekend only. The Summer Circus Intensive is an innovative six-week workshop, dedicated to the development of emerging professional artists.

About Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi, Artistic Director/Circus Choreographer

Sylvia, recently returned from a successful tour of *Lookingglass Alice*, is a second generation circus performer who grew up touring with various circuses, including Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus. She also performed at The Circus World Championships in London, England. In 1990 she moved to Chicago and began her career as a circus teacher and choreographer. Sylvia is a co-founder of The Actors Gymnasium and an Artistic Associate of The Lookingglass Theatre Company. Other theater credits include The Lyric Opera of Chicago, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Chicago Children's Theater, Marriott Theater, and The Steppenwolf Theatre, among others. She recently won the Illinois Theatre Association's Award of Honor, the 3Arts award for design, and she has been nominated for five Joseph Jefferson Awards for her choreography, winning four.

About Alex Tey & Sara Sawicki, Youth Circus Directors

Sara Sawicki & Alex Tey (Co-Writers/Directors of *Secrets, Lies, & Super Spies*): Sara and Alex are Chicago-based actors, directors and facilitators. Both have worked nationally with Sojourn Theatre, most recently as performer/facilitators in the professional premiere of *How to End Poverty* in collaboration with Portland Playhouse. They also work together as members of the performing health collective, For Youth Inquiry. Alex is the founding Artistic Director of Thirteen O'Clock Theatre, and an instructor here in Evanston with The Actors Gymnasium and Mudlark Theatre Company. Sara is a founding company member and Co-Artistic Director of Buzz22 Chicago where she directed the professional premiere of Laura Jacqmin's *Ghost Bike*. Both Alex and Sara are thrilled to return to Actors Gymnasium for a second helping of Youth Circus!

About Chris Matthews, Winter Circus Director

Chris is a company member with The House Theatre of Chicago where he has performed, written, and done every little thing in-between. With The House, he has co-written *Dave DaVinci Saves the Universe*, *The Sparrow*, *Rose and*

the Rime, and *The Hammer Trinity*. For The Actors Gym youth ensemble, he created *A'Musing Myths*, *The Last Voyage of Pirate Blackheart*, and *A Midsummer Night's Circus*. He was also seen on stage in *Lost & Found* in 2012. His work has also been seen at Lookingglass and Barrel of Monkeys, an outreach based theatre company that teaches creative writing in inner-city schools. Chris also performs motion capture for the Chicago-based videogame company Netherrealm Studios where he has embodied Johnny Cage and Batman. Thank you for supporting The Actors Gymnasium with your attendance.

About The Actors Gymnasium

The Actors Gymnasium is dedicated to bringing a new physicality to the American Theatre. Encouraging ground-breaking theatrical exploration, The Actors Gymnasium teaches circus arts, physical theatre and multi-disciplinary performance to children and adults; produces original, daring works of circus-theatre; and serves as a talent resource, providing performance opportunities to our students and innovative professional event entertainment for a wider audience. At The Actors Gymnasium, people Learn To Fly - physically, emotionally, and creatively.

Performance Information

Tickets can be purchased at www.actorsgymnasium.org. For group reservations and general questions call 847-328-2795. The on-location box office opens 1.5 hours prior to the start of each performance.

Friday performances begin at 7:30 pm; Saturday matinee performances begin at 4:30 pm and evening performances begin at 7:30 pm; matinees on Sunday begin at 3:00 pm.

The Actors Gymnasium venue is located at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes Street, Evanston, Illinois - just off of the Noyes purple line 'L' stop. Parking in the Noyes Cultural Center lot (permit & metered spots) is free after 6 pm Monday-Saturday and all day Sunday. There is additional free parking on Ridge Street and at the Civic Center around the corner, as well as metered parking on Noyes Street.