

Helen Hayes, Andrew Hinderaker Return to Olney with 'The Magic Play'

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From Olney Theatre: Olney Theatre Center, a Mid-Atlantic destination for extraordinary theater performance and education, presents the Rolling World Premiere of *The Magic Play* by Andrew Hinderaker, April 12 - May 7, 2017 in the Mainstage.

"It's a delight and honor to welcome playwright Andrew Hinderaker back to Olney Theatre Center," said Artistic Director Jason Loewith. "Andrew's innovative combination of traditional storytelling with event-based spectacle thrilled audiences across the region with *Colossal*, and I know *The Magic Play* is going to do the same."

Part magic show, part love story, *The Magic Play* is an evening of theatre unlike any other -- fusing the technical precision and improvisational crowdwork of a professional illusionist with the emotional and narrative arc of a master dramatist.

Brett Schneider stars as a talented Magician performing the magic show of a lifetime. A man who has risen to the top by maintaining absolute control over his performances (as well as his love life), the Magician's show goes off the rails when his lover (played by Helen Hayes Award-winner and Olney Theatre Artistic Associate Jon Hudson Odom) forces him to confront his fears, along with his washed-up magician father (Harry A. Winter). In this high-wire magic act that is both love story and sleight-of-hand, houses of cards tumble, a diver leaps into the air and audience members get to participate in wholly unexpected ways.

The role of The Magician was written specifically for Brett Schneider, who is a professional magician in addition to being an actor. The tricks and illusions performed during the action of the play were created by him in collaboration with playwright Andrew Hinderaker and Broadway stage magic designer Jim Steinmeyer (Mary Poppins). Said Hinderaker in an interview with Onstage magazine, "Brett is both a magician and an actor, so he embraces magic as a form of theater - and our conversations have always lived inside that dynamic."

Schneider adds in the same issue, "I can't say enough about how much of a gift this project has been for me over the last few years. It's pushed me in so many ways as a magician, an actor, an illusion designer, a storyteller, and has really helped me hone my craft. Andrew Hinderaker wrote this piece in a manner that the performance can't happen the same way twice, and the show will always be different depending on the audience that night. That's really exciting and really satisfies Andrew's desire to take real risks in the theater."

Playwright Andrew Hinderaker returns to Olney Theatre where in 2015 he won The Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play or Musical at the Helen Hayes Awards for Colossal. Hinderaker is an ensemble member of The Gift Theatre and an emeritus resident playwright at Chicago Dramatists. His plays include I Am Going to Change the World; Dirty; Kingsville and Suicide, Incorporated which was produced off-Broadway at Roundabout Theatre Company. Hinderaker was a staff writer for John Logan's Showtime series Penny Dreadful. He holds an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin.

Halena Kays, who directed the first installment of the Rolling World Premiere of The Magic Play at Chicago's Goodman Theatre, returns for its mounting at Olney Theatre Center. A Chicago-based director, Halena is the former Artistic Director of The Hypocrites and a founding member of the artistic collaborative, The Ruffians. She is an artistic associate with The Neo-Futurists and has directed at many Chicago theaters, including Steppenwolf Theatre. Kays is the co-founder and former artistic director of Barrel of Monkeys where she directed the majority of their public performances. She received her MFA in Directing from University of Texas at Austin. Halena has been nominated for a Jefferson Citation for Best Supporting Actress and Best Direction, was the recipient of the prestigious 3Arts Award, and was named one of the top 50 "players" in Chicago theater by NewCity. She is also a professor of directing at MTSU.

Hinderaker, Kays and Schneider are joined by several veterans of the Goodman run in Olney for the next leg of the rolling world premiere including Set Designer Lizzie Bracken, Costume Designer Alison Siple, Aerial Choreographer Sylvia Hernandez-Di Stasi, and Magic Consultant Jim Steinmeyer. Joining for the Olney production are Lighting Designer Jesse Belsky, Sound Designer Matthew M. Nielson, and John "Smooch" Medina as Projections Designer.

The Magic Play

By Andrew Hinderaker

Directed by Halena Kays

April 12 - May 7, 2017

Press Opening: Saturday, April 15 at 8:00 pm

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Performances are Wednesday - Saturday at 8:00 pm; matinees on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday at 2:00 pm. No matinee performance on April 12, 15 and 26.

Tickets start at \$50. Discounts available for groups, seniors, military and students.

Special Discussion:

Writing the Unproducible: A Conversation with Andrew Hinderaker

Saturday, April 15 at 5:00 pm

Playwright Andrew Hinderaker was issued a challenge by a professor in his MFA program: write a play that no one could possibly produce. The result was *Colossal*, which Olney Theatre Center premiered in 2014, and which went on to win the award for The Charles MacArthur Outstanding New Play or Musical at the 2015 Helen Hayes Awards. And now we're producing another impossible work by Andrew, *The Magic Play*, that requires a fallen house of cards to destroy itself, an actor to leap from a high-dive platform, and its lead performer to craft illusions on the spot with audience members. What were we thinking? But better yet, what was he thinking? Join us for an intimate Q&A with one of Olney's very favorite artists.

ABOUT OLNEY THEATRE CENTER

Olney Theatre Center is an award-winning, nonprofit, Equity theatre. Our mission is to produce and present extraordinary theatre and performance from our four-theatre campus for an ever-more diverse set of audiences in our community, and to educate the next generation of theatremakers to follow in our footsteps. We strive every day to unleash the creative potential of our artist and audiences, and in so doing, become Maryland's premier center for theatre performance and education. In the past four years, Olney Theatre has had eight world or regional premieres, including Andrew Hinderaker's *Colossal* (2015 Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play or Musical), and Jennifer Hoppe-House's *Bad Dog* (2015 Steinberg Award nominee). Olney Theatre places a priority on engaging our community by ensuring that we remain affordable, accessible and inviting to new and returning audiences.

Located just north of Washington, D.C. in arts-rich Montgomery County, Maryland, Olney Theatre Center offers a diverse array of over 300 professional productions year-round. It is situated on 14 wooded acres in the heart of the beautiful Washington-Baltimore-Frederick "triangle," within easy access to all three cities, and is also home to National Players, America's longest-running touring company. Olney Theatre Center is led by Artistic Director Jason Loewith and Managing Director Debbie Ellinghaus. For more information, please visit www.olneytheatre.org.

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Image courtesy of the Olney Theatre