

* E. Faye Butler and Susie McMonagle star in Northlight - Theatre's play with musi

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* E. Faye Butler and Susie McMonagle star in Northlight Theatre's play with music, "Black Pearl Sings!" Set during the Depression era and rooted in American folk songs, it's about an incarcerated African-American singer and the musicologist determined to introduce her to the world. Written by Frank Higgins, "Black Pearl Sings!" was inspired by blues guitarist Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter and John Avery Lomax. Previews begin Friday, Jan. 13, at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Blvd., Skokie. The show opens Friday, Jan. 20. (847) 673-6300 or northlight.org.

* Vitalist Theatre and DCA Theater team up for the U.S. premiere of "The Ghost is Here," a 1957 play set in post World War II Japan, by Japanese writer Kobo Abe. It's about a con artist named Oba (Jamie Vann) who gets grieving villagers to sell him photographs of their dead loved ones and then charges exorbitant rates when the villagers want to retrieve the photos. Compounding their problems is the "agent" representing the ghosts. The show opens Friday, Jan. 13, at the Storefront Theater, 66 E. Randolph St., Chicago. Vitalist artistic director Jaclynn Jutting directs. (312) 742-8497 or vitalisttheatre.org or dcatheater.org.

* Raven Theatre debuts Raven's Evermore Series showcasing performance artists. First up is Kelli Strickland with her solo show "We've Got a Badge For That," about her experience in girl scouting. Strickland performs at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Jan. 13-14, at 6157 N. Clark St., Chicago. (773) 338-2177 or raventheatre.com.

* Bohemian Theatre Ensemble adds a steampunk twist to Ranjit Bolt's contemporary translation of Moliere's "Tartuffe," about a religious charlatan who insinuates his way into a family to divest the patriarch of his riches and his wife. BoHo artistic director Peter Robel directs the show, which incorporates Victorian and futuristic aesthetics. The preview is Friday, Jan. 13, at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Ave., Chicago. The show opens Saturday, Jan. 14. (773) 975-8150 or bohotheatre.com.

* Goodman Theatre artistic associate Chuck Smith tackles for the first time a David Mamet play when Goodman presents the Chicago area premiere of "Race," about a pair of high-flying lawyers — one black and one white — who are called upon defend a white man accused of raping an African-American woman. Previews begin Saturday, Jan. 14, at 170 N. Dearborn St., Chicago. The show, which stars Patrick Clear, Marc Grapey, Geoffrey Owens and Tamberla Perry, opens Sunday, Jan. 22. (312) 43-3800 or goodmantheatre.org.

* British playwright Simon Stephens draws upon his experience as a teacher to examine the tension and violence underscoring adolescent life in "Punk Rock," which gets its American premiere courtesy of Griffin Theatre Company. Ensemble member Jonathan Berry directs the show, which previews Saturday, Jan. 14, at Theater Wit, 1229 W. Belmont Ave., Chicago. It opens Sunday, Jan. 22. (773) 975-8150 or griffintheatre.com.

* An amnesiac trying to forget his past fails to do so in the noir-inspired play "Devils Don't Forget" by Bob Fisher. The Mammals Theatre Company stages the play, the second in a cycle titled The Noir Triptych. Performances begin Saturday, Jan. 14, and run through Wednesday, Jan. 25, at Zoo Studios, 4001 N. Ravenswood Ave., Chicago. (866) 593-4614 or themammals.blogspot.com.

* Fox Valley Repertory Theater hosts a screening of "Gone with the Wind" in advance of its production of "Moonlight and Magnolias," a behind-the-scenes look at the making of the classic film. The screening takes place at 3 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 15, at the Arcada Theater, 105 E. Main St., St. Charles. Tickets are \$10 and proceeds benefit FVR. "Moonlight and Magnolias" begins previews on Thursday, Jan. 19, at the Pheasant Run Resort, 4051 E.

Main St., St. Charles. (630) 443-0438 or foxvalleyrep.org.

* Wes Perry examines his awkward, angsty teenage years in his solo show "Don't Act Like a Girl," opening Sunday, Jan. 15, at the Annoyance Theater, 4830 N. Broadway, Chicago. (773) 561-4665 or theannoyance.com. * Shattered Globe Theatre Company begins its 20th anniversary season with a staged reading of its hit 2003 production of the courtroom drama "Judgment at Nuremberg," at 12:15 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 15, at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center, 9603 Woods Drive, Skokie. Several original cast members will reprise their roles at the event. (847) 967-4889 or

ilholocaustmuseum.org or shatteredglobe.org.

* Katie Rich and Kate Duffy debut their new sketch comedy show, "The Mary Kay Letourneau Players Present ..." Sunday, Jan. 15, at iO Chicago, 3541 N. Clark St., Chicago. The show runs Sundays through Feb. 19. (773) 880-0199 or mkplayers.com or chicago.ioimprov.com.

* TimeLine Theatre Company's Chicago area premiere of Lucy Pebble's "Enron" marks the 50th production from the company, which was named one of the nation's top 10 emerging theaters by the American Theatre Wing. Previews begin Tuesday, Jan. 17, at 615 W. Wellington Ave., Chicago, for director Rachel Rockwell's production of the play recounting the circumstances leading up to and devastation that resulted from one of the worst financial scandals in U.S. history. Sean Fortunato stars as Andrew Fastow, with Bret Tuomi as Jeff Skilling and TimeLine associate Terry Hamilton as Ken Lay. The show opens Thursday, Jan. 26. (773) 281-8463 or timelinetheatre.com.

* Chicago Shakespeare and Redmoon theaters have teamed up for "The Feast: an intimate Tempest" an original adaptation of Shakespeare's play performed by three actors and an array of puppets. Jessica Thebus and Frank Maugeri cocreated and codirect the production featuring John Judd as Prospero, 500 Clown's Adrian Danzig as Caliban and Samuel Taylor as Ariel. Performances begin Wednesday, Jan. 18, at CST's upstairs theater on Navy Pier, 800 E. Grand Ave., Chicago. (312) 595-5600 or chicagoshakes.com.

* Carrie Coon, set to reprise her role in Steppenwolf Theatre's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" when the show opens on Broadway later this year, stars in Next Theatre's U.S. premiere of "The Girl in the Yellow Dress," an examination of race and class by South African playwright Craig Higginson. Coon plays Celia, a British woman who teaches English to a French-Congolese student played by Austin Talley. Previews begin Thursday, Jan. 19, at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes St., Evanston. The show opens Jan. 23. (847) 475-1875, ext. 2 or nexttheatre.org.

* The tale of wealthy brothers and compulsive hoarders who spent decades holed up in their New York City mansion inspired Mark Saltzman's "Clutter: The True Story of the Collyer Brothers who Never Threw Anything Out," in its Chicago area premiere courtesy of MadKap Production. Wayne Mell, managing director of Lake Forest's Citadel Theatre Company directs the production, which centers on the officers (who also happen to be brothers) investigating the death of Langley Collyer and whose troubled relationship mirrors that of the victim and his missing sibling. The show previews Thursday, Jan. 19, at the Greenhouse Theater Center, 2257 N. Lincoln Ave., Chicago. It opens Friday, Jan. 20. (312) 423-6612 or greenhousetheater.org.

* Steppenwolf Theatre ensemble member Austin Pendleton directs fellow ensemble members Francis Guinan and Sally Murphy in Donald Margulies' "Time Stands Still" about an international photojournalist who re-evaluates her life following a near-death experience in Iraq. Previews begin Thursday, Jan. 19, at 1650 N. Halsted St., Chicago. The show opens Saturday, Jan. 28. (312) 335-1650 or steppenwolf.org.

* Previews begin Thursday, Jan. 19, for Filament Theatre Ensemble and Den Ensemble's coproduction of Michael Healey's "The Drawer Boy" about a couple of World War II vets who begin examining their lives after an actor shows up at the farm to research a character for a play. Filament artistic director Julie Ritchey directs the first-time collaboration featuring Will Kinnear, Marco Minichiello and Nick Polus. The show opens Sunday, Jan. 22, at The Den Theatre, 1333 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago. (773) 270-1660 or filamenttheatre.org.

* ETA Creative Arts Foundations offers theatergoers the chance to see three plays for the price of two. For \$50, patrons can see "The Legend of Buster Neal" (running through March 4); "Tangled" (March 29 to May 20) and "Dowager Daughters of Transcendence (DDT's)" (June 14 to Aug. 5) at 7558 S. South Chicago Ave., Chicago. (773) 752-3955 or etacreativearts.org.

* Profiles Theatre has extended its world-premiere production of "Assisted Living," Dierdre O'Connor's play about a 40-year-old single woman who begins a relationship with a younger, dimwitted man. Performances continue through Feb. 19, at Profiles' second space, The Second Stage, 3408 N. Sheffield Ave., Chicago. (773) 549-1815 or profilestheatre.org.

* Trap Door Theatre has extended its production of "the word progress on my mother's lips doesn't ring true." Matei Visniec's surrealist play about refugees trying to rebuild their lives. Performances continue through Saturday, Jan. 21, at 1655 W. Cortland Ave., Chicago. (773) 384-0494 or trapdoortheatre.com.

* The Actors Gymnasium in Evanston has named Jerry R. Foust, former executive director of California's Berkeley Playhouse, as its new executive director. "We are excited to have someone with Jerry's breadth of experience in arts management and education joining us to lead our organization," said board president Peggy A. Nelson in a prepared statement. The Actors Gymnasium is an ensemble rooted in physical theater and circus arts in residence at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center. For more information, see actorsgymnasium.com

— Barbara Vitello

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