

N E W S

Portland Center Stage Unveils Studio Theater with Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-Winning *I Am My Own Wife* by Doug Wright

Local favorite Wade McCollum to play enigmatic Nazi-era transvestite,
Charlotte von Mahlsdorf and 34 other characters including the playwright

October 18, 2006 – PORTLAND On the heels of an extended run (through November 12th) of the Main Stage season-opener, *West Side Story* in the newly renovated **Gerding Theater at the Armory**, Portland Center Stage is now poised to mount a one-actor tour-de-force in the very intimate downstairs Studio theater: *I Am My Own Wife* by **Doug Wright**. Because this show is so heavily subscribed, Portland Center Stage has extended the run of *I Am My Own Wife* by an additional week (through December 23rd) beyond the closing date reported in the original season announcement, season brochure and single ticket brochure.

Winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and two 2004 Tony Awards (Best Play, Best Actor - Jefferson Mays), *I Am My Own Wife* chronicles the life and times of **Charlotte von Mahlsdorf**, curator of Berlin's pre-eminent museum of Grunderzeit-era antiques who, although born as a boy, survived the oppressive Nazi and Communist East German regimes, dressed simply and modestly, as a woman. The playwright has uniquely written himself and his own fascination with Charlotte into the play, along with Charlotte and 33 additional characters, all of whom will be played by Portland acting/singing phenomenon **Wade McCollum**.

I Am My Own Wife previews in the Studio at the Gerding Theater at the Armory, 128 NW Eleventh Ave. at Davis, Sunday, November 5 - Thursday, November 9 (Dark Monday); opens Friday, November 10 and closes with matinée and evening performances on Saturday, December 23. All evening performances take place at 7:30 PM while Noon Thursday and 2 PM Saturday and Sunday matinées are also available. Tickets: \$16.50, 30+under SUN - THUR eves, \$29.50 - \$59.50, general; box office: 503-445-3700; information: www.pcs.org.

As a boy, Charlotte von Mahlsdorf was known as **Lothar Berfelde** and was forced by his father, Max, a member of the Nazi Party, to join the Hitler Youth. From a young age Charlotte identified much more as female than male and had an aunt (who cross-dressed as a man) who helped her become more comfortable expressing this identification openly. After the fall of the Third Reich, Charlotte began the work of collecting antique German furniture. Her home in East Berlin would eventually become the world renowned **Grunderzeit Museum**, which she curated with great tenacity most of her adult life.

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In the 1970s the museum served a second function as a meeting and party locale for the East Berlin gay community and was, for a period, threatened with complete dissolution by the East German government. When Charlotte began giving items away to museum visitors, and some known associates of hers were apprehended by Stasi agents, this threat was strangely suspended.

Late in her life, critics cast a shadow across the many decisions Charlotte made in order to survive and in order to preserve her cherished treasures and what they represented of a heritage that made her proud and grateful. Some contested that her museum was stocked at the expense of Jewish émigrés and victims of the Holocaust while others accused her of collaborating with the East German Stasi under the codename "Park." Beyond the question of "how did this amazing and eccentric personality persist under two of the most brutal and conformist regimes in modern history?", *I Am My Own Wife* grapples with these deeper ethical questions and with the playwright's personal process of fascination and disappointment with and eventual reverence for the life that Charlotte von Mahlsdorf lived.

The playwright, Doug Wright, is most famous for authoring the regional play *Quills* and its screenplay adaptation. During the 1990s he began a series of visits with someone a mutual friend thought would be of interest to him: Charlotte von Mahlsdorf. Over the course of several years he collected transcripts and recordings from their meetings, found inspiration in the path she forged for all openly gay people everywhere and eventually recognized that she was merely human and subject to the same circumstances of survival as all of us. It was when the play was actually in production on Broadway - with Moises Kaufman directing and Jefferson Mays starring - that it was coaxed from Wright's pen in final, Pulitzer Prize-winning form.

The director of PCS' production, **Victor Pappas**, spent seven years as Associate Artistic Director of Seattle's Intiman Theatre where he directed such classics as *The Glass Menagerie* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Pappas also directed *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* a play by Moises Kaufman. For directing the world premiere of *South Central Rain* by Jamie Baker Pappas won the LA Drama Critics Award for Outstanding Direction. He is currently Associate Chair of the Graduate Acting Program at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, where he has directed several plays including *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Pygmalion*.

With some 30 characters all played by one actor, *I Am My Own Wife* is at once expansive and intimate and is a perfect opener for Portland Center Stage's new black-box Studio, 27 feet underground and seating an audience of up to 200. *I Am My Own Wife* also offers an unusual theater experience, the opportunity to hear the playwright speak through a character in his own unmasked image. The only local actor with the known range for such a work was Wade McCollum and PCS is grateful that his time was available for this play.

Wade McCollum has become something of a Portland theater phenomenon, especially for singing and acting roles, but his talents at both, independently, stand on their own. He has performed with **Portland Center Stage** as Batboy in *Batboy: The Musical* (2003) and as Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice* (2003). Most recently Wade performed several roles (including the adorably impudent Phaeton) in **Artist Repertory Theatre's** *Metamorphoses* and as Lee Harvey Oswald and the Balladeer in ART's production of Stephen Sondheim's *Assassins*. In the summer of 2005 he played Dr. Frankenfurter in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (**triangle! Productions**). Wade is also well-known for his role as Hedwig in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (triangle! Productions) which re-appeared in Portland recently and in the summer of 2004 he earned the role in Los Angeles where it garnered an L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award, a Backstage Garland Award for Best Actor and an Ovation Award for Best Musical. As Artistic Director and co-Founder of Portland's **Insight Out Theatre Collective**, Wade wrote, co-composed and starred in *ONE - The Musical* based on the Herman Hesse classic *Siddhartha*. His first vocal CD, *Beauty is a Streetlight*, was released this summer and will be available for sale in the Studio lobby at the Gerding Theater at the Armory for the duration of the run of *I Am My Own Wife*.

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I Am My Own Wife

By Doug Wright

Directed by Victor Pappas * Starring Wade McCollum

Originally produced on Broadway by Delphi Productions and David Richenthal

Portland Center Stage * Gerding Theater at the Armory * 128 NW Eleventh Ave.

Tickets \$16.50 - \$59.50 * **Box Office 503-445-3700** * info: www.pcs.org

EVENINGS 7:30 PM

Tuesdays Nov. 7(P), 14, 21, 28, Dec. 5, 12, 19

Wednesdays Nov. 8(P), 15, 22, 29, Dec. 6, 13, 20

Thursdays Nov. 9(P), 16, 30, Dec. 7, 14, 21

Fridays Nov. 10(O), 17, 24, Dec. 1, 8, 15, 22

Saturdays Nov. 11, 18, 25, Dec. 2, 9, 16, 23

Sundays Nov. 5(P), 12, 26, Dec. 10, 17(C)

MATINEES

Noon with Q&A after show

Thursdays Nov 16, 30

Dec. 7, 14

2PM

Saturdays Nov. 18, 25, Dec. 2, 23

Sundays Nov. 12, 19, 26

Dec. 3, 10, 17

NO PERFORMANCES ON THANKSGIVING DAY

DUE TO THE INTIMATE NATURE OF THIS THEATER AND THIS PRODUCTION THERE WILL BE

ABSOLUTELY NO LATE SEATING or RE-ADMITTANCE FOR *I AM MY OWN WIFE*

(P) = Preview • (O) = Opening Night • (C) = Closing Evening

Student/Senior Matinees

Every Thursday Matinee at Noon is programmed especially for our student and senior audiences. Patrons enjoy discounted ticket prices and post-show Q&A sessions with the cast and crew of *I Am My Own Wife*.

Prologue

Join us for a lively pre-show introduction to the play you are about to see with PCS Literary and Education staff and/or special guests.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings, November 14 – December 14

6:30PM In the Studio

Access Performances

Audio Described

Sign Interpreted

Friday, November 17 7:30 PM

Thursday, November 30

7:30 PM

The Gerding Theater at the Armory's Studio is fully accessible for all people with disabilities. Assistive listening devices are available from the coatroom in the main lobby, **free** of charge.

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PORTLAND CENTER STAGE, established in 1988, is Portland's flagship theater company, attracting more than 90,000 theatergoers annually. With five Main Stage and four Studio productions in the 2006-2007 Season, PCS produces a blend of classical, contemporary and world premiere works in addition to its annual summer playwrights festival, Just Add Water/West. PCS is engaged in a \$36 million capital campaign to fund the renovation of the historic Portland Armory, our new home in Portland's Pearl District. The Gerding Theater at the Armory houses a 599-seat Main Stage and a 200-seat black box Studio, and is the first building on the National Register of Historic Places, and the first performing arts venue in the world, to achieve the pinnacle of green building certification; Platinum LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). To date, more than \$27 million has been secured for the project. The new Gerding Theater at the Armory opened to the public with an outdoor community celebration on October 1, 2006.

The Portland Center Stage 2006-2007 Inaugural Season in the
Gerding Theater at the Armory

- *West Side Story* based on a conception of Jerome Robbins; Book by Arthur Laurents; Music by Leonard Bernstein; Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, Directed by Chris Coleman, October 3 – November 5, 2006, Main Stage – **EXTENDED THROUGH NOVEMBER 12!**
- *I Am My Own Wife* by Doug Wright, Directed by Victor Pappas, November 7 – December 17, 2006, Studio
- *This Wonderful Life* by Steve Murray, Conceived by Mark Setlock, Directed by Cliff Baker, November 26 – December 24, 2006, Main Stage
- *Misalliance* by George Bernard Shaw, Directed by Chris Coleman, January 9 – February 4, Main Stage
- *Act a Lady* by Jordan Harrison, Directed by Cliff Baker, January 28 – March 11, 2007, Studio
- *The Thugs* by Adam Bock, Directed by Rose Riordan, Feb. 9 – March 10, 2007 (10:30 pm, Friday and Saturday nights only), Studio
- *The Pillowman* by Martin McDonagh, Directed by Rose Riordan, February 18 – March 18, 2007, Main Stage
- *Fences* by August Wilson, Directed by Jonathan Wilson, April 10-May 6, 2007, Main Stage
A co-production with Hartford Stage Company and Dallas Theater Center
- *Bad Dates* by Theresa Rebeck, Directed by Timothy Near, April 15 – June 10, 2007, Studio

www.pcs.org