

November 4, 2014

***Red Noses* at Lewis Center for the Arts**

***Princeton’s Program in Theater presents Peter Barnes’ award-winning, edgy comedy about a ragtag, roving band of performers striving to spread joy during the Black Plague***



Photo caption: Costume sketch for the character of Scarron in the Lewis Center for the Arts’ production of *Red Noses*, opening November 14.

Photo credit: Brad Scoggins, Costume Designer

What: *Red Noses* by Peter Barnes, an award-winning, edgy comedyabout a ragtag, roving band of performers striving to spread joy during the Black Plague

Who: Directed by theater faculty member Tracy Bersley and an ensemble cast of Princeton undergraduate students, presented by the Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater

When: November 14, 15, 20, 21 and 22 at 8:00 p.m.

Where: Berlind Theatre at McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton

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(Princeton, NJ) The Lewis Center for the Arts’ Program in Theater will present Peter Barnes’ award-winning, edgy comedy *Red Noses* about a ragtag, roving band of performers striving to spread joy during Europe’s Black Plague. *Red Noses*, directed by faculty member Tracy Bersley, will be presented on November 14, 15, 20, 21 and 22 at the Berlind Theatre at McCarter Theatre Center.

Confronted by the mass devastation of the Black Plague in 14th-century France, a desperate priest, Father Flote, seeks a way to serve God’s will and ease humankind’s gruesome suffering. God’s reply? Spread joy, obliterate misery! Or as quoted in the script, "Peacocks not ravens… red noses not Black Death." Flote gathers a theatrical troupe, including a juggler who is blind, a team of one-legged dancers, a comedian who stutters, and a poet who is mute and communicates by ringing bells. The group includes a wayward nun. “I lost my virginity,” she confesses, “but I still have the box it came in.” With moments of great humor and extreme heartbreak, the play follows Father Flote and this band of clowns, known as the Red Noses, in their romp among the plague-affected villages of France.

As the motley crew of Red Noses navigates the treacherous landscape of 1348, they encounter corpse-robbers and scavengers, self-flagellants, a dancing leper, penny-pinching gold merchants who have turned to wasting all of their money on shrewd prostitutes, and others who try their patience and good humor. In the midst of all this chaos and absurdity, the Red Noses continue to bring mirth to a suffering world, and to laugh in the face of death. However, danger looms at the end of the play, when the plague lifts and the corrupt, wealthy, and powerful return to reassert their control over the world.

*Red Noses* is considered by many to be Barnes’ best work. Prolific as a writer for stage, film and television, his work often skewers the hypocrisy and corruption of the privileged. The British playwright is perhaps best known for his play *The Ruling Class*, a black comedy made into a film in 1972 starring Peter O’Toole. As a playwright, Barnes believed fiercely in the power of humor to effect social change. Written in 1978, *Red Noses* had its first run at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1985, a production that won Barnes an Olivier Award. In true Barnes fashion, *Red Noses* celebrates the subversive power of laughter. With cruelty, corruption, and contagion in this world, and hell’s damnation in the next, Barnes proposes that laughter, joy, and the foolish clown present the most critical revolutionary danger to the wealthy and powerful.

Bersley’s interpretation of *Red Noses* will explore the multidisciplinary nature of Barnes’ work, incorporating elements of improvisation, live music, clowning, acrobatics and vaudeville-style humor to provide a blend of biting satire and broad comedy.

“Because, in the theatre, we are asked to capture the idea that we are both creating and reflecting on a time in the distant past, I am always struck by the challenge of how history lives within us as individuals and as a society in our current time and place,” explains Bersley. “Our way into the play is a unique one (using the audience in as many ways as possible)—and one that I hope will help us both tell the story Barnes so artfully laid out for us, but also involve, cherish and implicate the audience in the spirit of clown, circus, vaudeville and farce. But the flip side of this participation in the drama is the darkness of dealing with who we are *now* in relationship to how we deal with human atrocities. Theatre always lives in both the past and the present and that is one of the most miraculous things about it. This is a rumination on how, even today, we can respond to human suffering with intolerance, carelessness, incapacitating fear, or perhaps there is another response—one that moves us closer towards the light.”

Bersley has also directed a number of other Theater Program productions including *The Winter’s Tale*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *House of Blue Leaves*, and completed a directing residency in 1999-2000 at McCarter Theatre where she collaborated with such artists as Sam Shepard, David Mamet, and Emily Mann. She has directed and choreographed for numerous other universities and theater companies such as New York University, The Juilliard School, the Public Theatre, The Acting Company, PS 122, and Lincoln Center in productions ranging from new adaptations to Shakespeare to opera.

The *Red Noses* ensemble cast of Princeton undergraduates includes Daniel Caprera ’16, Sarah Cuneo ’15, Nadia Diamond ’17, Blake Edwards ’15, Kat Giordano ’18, Evelyn Giovine ’16, Maeli Goren ’15, Adam Hudnut-Beumler ’17, Abby Melick ’17, Emma Michalak ’18, Kanoa Mulling ’15, Julia Peiperl ‘17, Cameron Platt ’16, Catherine Sharp ’18, Evan Strasnick ’15, Steven Tran ’15, Andrew Ward ’15, and Emma Watkins ’18 with musician Sarah Dinovelli ’18. Cat Andre ’16 and Adin Walker ’16 serve as assistant directors, Steven Tran ’15 as music director, Lena Henke ’16 as acrobatic consultant, and Maeli Goren ’15 as dramaturg for this production.

The professional design team includes sets by Jeff Van Velsor, costumes by Brad Scoggins, and lighting by Jen Schriever with Kristy Dodson of New York-based Overture Ensemble as movement director.

The Berlind Theatre is an accessible venue. Assistive listening devices are available upon request when attending a performance. Patrons in need of other access accommodations are invited to contact the Lewis Center at 609.258.5262 or LewisCtr-Comm@princeton.edu for assistance at least two weeks prior to the selected performance.

Tickets for *Red Noses* are $15 general admission, $10 for students, and are available through the McCarter box office at 609.258.2787 or on-line at [www.mccarter.org/TicketOffice/buytickets.aspx?page\_id=22](http://www.mccarter.org/TicketOffice/buytickets.aspx?page_id=22), through Princeton University Ticketing by calling 609.258.9220 or on-line at [www.princeton.edu/utickets/](http://www.princeton.edu/utickets/), or at the Frist Campus Center Ticket Office. Tickets will also be available at the Berlind box office prior to each performance.

The Lewis Center’s Program in Theater annually presents a major, professionally produced play in the fall, as well as a number of student senior thesis productions throughout the year. Upcoming this season are the Vietnam era drama *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* by David Rabe, a new adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s *The Diary of a Madman*, the colorful children’s play *The Magic Rainforest: An Amazon Journey* by José Cruz González, the Tony Award-winning musical *Spring Awakening*, Paula Vogel’s Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *How I Learned to Drive*, a new play, an new “experiential” musical, cabaret performances, and a new work incorporating aerial choreography.

To learn more about this event, the Program in Theater, and the over 100 other activities presented at the Lewis Center visit [arts.princeton.edu](http://www.princeton.edu/arts).

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