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**SHAKESPEARE THEATRE COMPANY'S 2005-2006 SEASON CONTINUES WITH
AESCHYLUS'
The Persians
A NEW VERSION BY ELLEN MCLAUGHLIN
DIRECTED BY ETHAN MCSWEENY**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Shakespeare Theatre Company continues its 2005-2006 season with Aeschylus' *The Persians*, in a new version by Ellen McLaughlin, directed by Ethan McSweeney. The production runs from April 4 to May 21, 2006. One of only six surviving plays by the "Father of Tragedy," Aeschylus' *The Persians* is a cautionary tale pondering the perils of unbridled pride and overreaching power. For the production, McSweeney directs a cast that includes Helen Carey, Erin Gann, Scott Parkinson and Ted van Griethuysen.

This production is made possible in part through the generous support of **The Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA)**. Media partner ***The New Republic*** provides promotional support throughout the run.

A veteran of the war between the Athenians and the Persians, Aeschylus dramatized the conflict by writing from the viewpoint of his former enemy, the vanquished Persians. Evoking sorrow for the once-powerful Persia, Aeschylus depicts the collapse of an empire felled by greed and arrogance. The play opens with a chorus of Persian elders, who fear the worst for their king, Xerxes, and his army. Their worries are echoed by Xerxes' mother, Queen Atossa, who is anxious and distraught after a portentous dream. A messenger arrives with news of the Persian army's catastrophic defeat, and Atossa and the elders begin to mourn. The elders sing an incantation, raising the ghost of Atossa's husband, Darius. When Darius hears the news, he condemns Xerxes' violent arrogance and warns that he must be rehabilitated. Xerxes enters, alone and in rags, the sole survivor of his military battles.

"Aeschylus wrote this play as a warning to his fellow Athenians," McSweeney explains. "It is no accident that the golden age of Athens occurred after this battle. Imagine a group of people surviving a war where they were sure to die ... and not only did they live, they won. It would be like what happened in America after the Revolutionary War—a sensational flowering and advancement by people emboldened after facing certain doom and coming up winners.

“At the time Aeschylus wrote *The Persians*, the Athenians were in the midst of taking over the Delian League [a confederacy of ancient Greek states]. They were in the midst of starting to become despots in spite of the fact that they were democrats or a democracy. And they were in the midst of creating the same set of circumstances (in microcosm) that ultimately had failed in Persia. Aeschylus was writing this as a cautionary tale to avoid the hubris of empire.”

THE DIRECTOR

Ethan McSweeney made his Broadway debut with the critically acclaimed revival of Gore Vidal's *The Best Man* starring Charles Durning, Spalding Gray, Chris Noth, Elizabeth Ashley, Christine Ebersole and Michael Learned (2001 Tony Award nomination, New York Outer Critics Circle Award and Drama Desk Award for Best Revival). He made his off-Broadway debut with John Logan's *Never the Sinner* (1998 Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Off-Broadway Play, and 12 additional Outer Critics and Drama Desk Award nominations including Best Play and Best Director).

McSweeney first directed a production of *The Persians* (with Len Cariou and Roberta Maxwell) for the National Actors Theatre in 2003. Recent credits include productions for the Prince Music Theater, South Coast Repertory, Guthrie Theater, Old Globe and Chautauqua Theatre Company. During his career, McSweeney has directed on many of the nation's finest stages, including at the George Street Playhouse (Associate Director 2000-2004), Pittsburgh Public Theater, Wilma Theater, San Jose Repertory, Alley Theatre, Berkeley Repertory, Signature Theatre, Washington Shakespeare Company, Folger Theatre and the Shakespeare Theatre Company, where he served as Associate Director from 1993-1997.

In Washington, McSweeney's work was recognized with a total of 12 Helen Hayes Award nominations for *Mad about the Bard*, *Triumph of Love* and *Never the Sinner*. He has workshopped new plays and musicals at The Public Theater, Manhattan Theatre Club, O'Neill Playwrights Conference, Kennedy Center, Cape Cod Theatre Project, Pacific Playwrights Festival, Playwrights Center of Minneapolis, HB, EST and New Dramatists, where he was Resident Director for the 2001-2002 season.

McSweeney consults on the programming for the National Actors Theatre and the Cape Cod Theater Project, and, with Vivienne Benesch, was appointed Co-Artistic Director of the Chautauqua Theater Company and summer conservatory. He received the first undergraduate degree in Theatre and Dramatic Arts from Columbia University.

ELLEN MCLAUGHLIN

Ellen McLaughlin's plays have received numerous national and international productions. They include *Days and Nights Within*, *A Narrow Bed*, *Infinity's House*, *Iphigenia and Other Daughters*, *Tongue of a Bird*, *The Trojan Women*, *Helen*, *The Persians* and *Oedipus*. Her most recent publication, by T.C.G., is *The Greek Plays*.

Producers of her plays include Actors Theater of Louisville, Actors' Gang L.A., Classic Stage Co., Intiman Theater, Almeida Theater, Mark Taper Forum, The Public Theater, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, National Actors Theater and Guthrie Theater, among other venues.

Grants and awards include Great American Play Contest, Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, the NEA, the Writer's Award from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund and the Berilla Kerr Award for playwrighting.

McLaughlin is also an actor. She has worked on and off Broadway as well as extensively in regional theatre. She is most well known for having originated the part of the Angel in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, appearing in every U.S. production from its earliest workshops through its Broadway run. Other favorite roles include The Homebody in *Homebody/Kabul*, Pirate Jenny in *Threepenny Opera* (Elliot Norton Award), Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* and Agave in *The Bacchae* at La MaMa.

THE CAST

Helen Carey returns to the Shakespeare Theatre Company for the first time since her role as Cleopatra in the 1996-1997 production of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Carey plays Atossa, mother to Xerxes. Carey's Shakespeare Theatre Company credits include roles in *Henry VI*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Volpone*, *Macbeth* (1995), *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. She has performed in numerous productions at the Guthrie Theater and also has appeared at Roundabout Theatre Company, the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Berkshire Theater Festival, Arena Stage, Hartford Stage and McCarter Theatre. She earned a Tony nomination and Theater World Award for her role in *London Assurance*.

Erin Gann returns to play Xerxes. Gann last appeared at the Shakespeare Theatre Company as Benvolio in *Romeo and Juliet* (2002). A graduate of the Juilliard School, Gann has appeared in productions with the Atlantic Theatre Company, New York's Midtown International Theatre Festival and the New York City Fringe Festival.

Scott Parkinson makes his Shakespeare Theatre Company debut as the Herald. Parkinson's stage credits include performances with the Court Theatre, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival and the Old Globe.

Ted van Griethuysen returns to play Darius, Xerxes father. Van Griethuysen last appeared with the Shakespeare Theatre Company as Philip Strozzi in *Lorenzaccio*. Other Shakespeare Theatre Company credits include performances in *Macbeth*, *Henry IV, Part 1* and *Part 2*, *Ghosts*, *The Silent Woman*, *Don Carlos*, *Richard II*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Country Wife*, *Coriolanus* and *King Lear*. Van Griethuysen's Broadway credits include roles in *Romulus*, *Inadmissible Evidence* and *Galileo*. He also has appeared Off-Broadway at the New York Shakespeare Festival, Eastside Playhouse, Opposites Company, Roundabout Theatre Company and La MaMa, and in regional productions at the Folger Theatre, Studio Theatre, American Shakespeare Festival, Long Wharf Theatre and Hartford Stage, among others.

The production also features **Emery Battis**, **Ed Dixon**, **Floyd King**, **Don Mayo**, **John Livingstone Rolle**, **David Sabin**, **John Seidman** and **David Emerson Toney** as Counselors; percussionist **N. Scott Robinson**; percussionist **Orlando Cotto**; cellist **Caroline Kang**; and ensemble members **Dacyl Acevedo**, **Jordan Coughtry**, **Blake Ellis**, **Stephen Graybill**, **Nicholas Urda** and **Ryan Young**.

THE DESIGNERS

For the production, McSweeney has reunited with the designers from his first production of *The Persians*. For the set, **James Noone** has designed a sunken wooden circle surrounded by 18 tons of red sand. Noone's Shakespeare Theatre Company credits include *Othello* (2005) and *Cyrano*, for which he won a Helen Hayes Award. His Broadway credits include *Match*, *Urban Cowboy*, *A Class Act*, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Night Must Fall*, *The Rainmaker*, *Getting and Spending*, *The Gin Game*, *The Sunshine Boys* and *Inherit the Wind*. He also has designed for numerous opera companies, regional theatres and Off-Broadway productions. Costume Designer **Jess Goldstein** has combined contemporary street clothes and military fatigues with his imagining of ancient Persian clothing. Goldstein's credits for the Theatre include *Othello*, *The Little Foxes*, *Coriolanus* (2000) and *Love's Labor's Lost* (1987). Goldstein's numerous Broadway credits include *Proof*, *The Rainmaker*, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, *Inherit the Wind* and *The Rivals*, for which he won a Tony Award. Regionally his work has been seen at Guthrie Theater, Hartford Stage, Long Wharf Theatre and Arena Stage. **Kevin Adams** will create the lighting design for the production. Adams' Broadway credits include *Take Me Out*, John Leguizamo's *Sexaholix*, *Hedda Gabler*, *A Class Act* and *An Almost Holy Picture* with Kevin Bacon. The design team also includes Composer/Musical Director **Michael Roth**, Choreographer **Marcela Lorca**, Projection Designer **Michael Clark**, Resident Sound Designer **Martin Desjardins**, and Voice and Text Coach **Ellen O'Brien**.

PRODUCTION SPONSOR

The mission of The Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation (USA) focuses on furthering cultural relations between Greece and the United States. Since its inception six years ago, the Affiliate Foundation (USA) has developed important educational and cultural activities in order to bring the American public closer to the Hellenic civilization and our common humanistic heritage.

Through the Foundation's major educational initiative, the University Seminars Program, more than 70 eminent professors and scholars from all over the world visited more than 180 universities and other educational and cultural institutions. The Program also offered tens of thousands of students the opportunity to participate in lectures and seminars on Hellenic culture and civilization. International conferences organized by the Foundation in the United States and Canada have provided a forum for debating, understanding and enhancing Classical and Hellenic Studies.

At the Onassis Cultural Center in New York City, the Affiliate Foundation has organized six major thematic exhibitions in cooperation with some of the most important museums in Greece, the United States and Europe. More than 100,000 visitors were able to admire masterpieces that highlighted the Hellenic artistic expression and lifestyle from classical antiquity through Byzantium to modern times.

In addition, scores of important cultural events of the highest quality, including lectures, dramatic readings, musical evenings, and literary and theatrical panel discussions, have been organized in New York and other American cities. Through these exhibitions, lectures and international conferences, the American public has been offered a wonderful view of the everlasting human quest for truth and beauty that started in Greece thousands of years ago and continues today throughout the world.

MEDIA PARTNER

For our production of *The Persians*, the Shakespeare Theatre Company is pleased to welcome the return of *The New Republic* as its Media Partner. Media Partners play an instrumental role in helping the Shakespeare Theatre Company to facilitate its ever greater need to expand its marketing reach. In past seasons the magazine partnered with the Theatre for both *The Country Wife* and *Richard II* (2000).

One of America's preeminent journals of opinion, *The New Republic*, like the Shakespeare Theatre Company, is a Washington institution whose influence is felt across the nation. For more than 90 years, the magazine has challenged its readers with cogent opinion

and pointed commentary on politics, public policy, foreign affairs, business, science and the cultural arts.

Under the leadership of owner and Editor-in-Chief Martin Peretz, *The New Republic's* editors and writers are known for their ability to get at the important stories well before they reach the mainstream. In the magazine's celebrated "back of the book," some of the country's most savvy cultural critics deliver insightful perspectives on books and the arts.

The New Republic is published weekly and is available online at www.tnr.com.

SPECIAL PERFORMANCES AND EVENTS

- On Sunday, April 9, at 1 p.m., the Shakespeare Theatre Company continues *Windows*, a lively discussion and introduction to *The Persians* with local scholars and members of the artistic staff. All are welcome. Call 202.547.1122 and press 4 or visit ShakespeareTheatre.org to reserve a space.
- Following the evening performance of *The Persians* on Wednesday, April 12, all are welcome for a post-show discussion with members of the cast. Those attending the evening's performance are guaranteed seats. Limited additional seating is available on a first-come basis. Call 202.547.1122 for the approximate start time. No reservations required.
- On Saturday, April 29, following the 2 p.m. matinee, the Shakespeare Theatre Company and the Embassy of Greece/Press and Communications Office welcome Cornell University Professor Barry Strauss, author of *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece – and Western Civilization*, to discuss the history of the battle. Call 202.547.1122, option 4, or visit ShakespeareTheatre.org to reserve a space.
- On Saturday, May 13, following the 2 p.m. matinee, the Shakespeare Theatre Company sponsors Classics in Context. This lively discussion features scholars and artists discussing their connection to the play. Call 202.547.1122 and press 4 or visit ShakespeareTheatre.org to reserve a space.
- There will be audio-described performances of *The Persians* on Saturday, April 29, at 2 p.m. and Thursday, May 4, at 8 p.m. Sign-interpreted performances are Tuesday, May 9, at 7:30 p.m. and Saturday, May 13, at 2 p.m.

FACT SHEET: Aeschylus' *The Persians*
A new version by Ellen McLaughlin
Directed by Ethan McSweeney

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DATES: April 4 to May 21, 2006
Press Night: Sunday, April 9, 2006
Opening Night: Monday, April 10, 2006

LOCATION: Shakespeare Theatre Company, 450 7th St. NW, between D and E streets, just off Pennsylvania Avenue, between the Capitol and the White House.

TIMES: Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m. (except April 11); Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 p.m.; Sundays at 7:30 p.m.; matinees on Saturdays and Sundays at 2 p.m. (except April 9); matinee at noon on Wednesday, May 3

TICKETS: \$14.25-\$71.25 with discounts available for senior citizens and students.

ACCESSIBILITY: The Lansburgh Theatre is accessible to persons with disabilities, offering wheelchair-accessible seating and restrooms, audio enhancement, and Braille and large print programs.

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PARKING: Paid parking is available in the PMI parking garage on D Street, between Eighth and Ninth streets, and the Colonial Parking garage in the Lansburgh building (enter on Eighth Street between D and E streets).

METRO: Archives-Navy Mem'l- Penn Quarter station (Yellow and Green Lines) is one and one-half blocks south of the Theatre. Gallery Pl-Chinatown station (Red, Yellow and Green Lines) is one block north of the Theatre at the Verizon Center. For further information, call Metro at 202.637.7000.

Box Office: 202.547.1122 (voice) TTY: 202.638.3863 Toll Free: 877.487.8849
ShakespeareTheatre.org

The vast majority of Persians practice Shiaite Islam . Before the Muslim conquest of Persia in the 7th century ce , most Persians followed Zoroastrianism , based on the teachings of the ancient prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra), who lived during the first half of the 1st millennium bce . In 21st-century Iran there remain a small number of Zoroastrians; larger numbers of Zoroastrians now live in South Asia .^Â The Persians are known for their intricately inlaid metalwork as well as for their legacy of extraordinary architecture. The Babylonians ruled the world in the sixth century B.C. Yet, afterwards, in the course of about half a century, they ceased to exist. This is remarkable enough, but it is even more astounding that their successors, the Persians, had did not existed before! In 560 B.C., Cyrus the Great became the king of Persia, a small state in the Middle East, and within 30 years had replaced the Babylonian empire with his own. Cyrus also unexpectedly told the Jews that they could return to their homeland. The Persians were the only ones exempted from the payment of tributes. They held the charges higher up in the hierarchy, as much on the administrative level as on the military. At the top of the empire, the monarch was found. The power of the king was absolute nothing nor no one was able to compete with his authority. The Persians had the idea that the king received his authority from their god (Ahura-Mazda) by whom he was chosen. "The Persians" was the second part of a trilogy that won the first prize at the dramatic competitions in Athens^{â€™} City Dionysia festival in 472 BCE. The first play in the trilogy was called "Phineus"; it presumably dealt with Jason and the Argonauts^{â€™} rescue of King Phineus from the torture that the monstrous harpies inflicted at the behest of Zeus.