



For Immediate Release

Mortar Theatre Company announces head-to-head season of Chicago premieres

Season 2 opens in April with *I Am Montana* by Samuel D. Hunter

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(CHICAGO, Feb. 11 2011) Mortar Theatre Company announces their second season of hard-hitting Chicago premieres exploring violence in the American landscape. Mortar will produce two productions at the **Athenaeum Theatre** beginning in April and will introduce The Graphite Series, a new play development program, at Steep Theatre in March. Tickets will be available online at **MortarTheatreCompany.org**.

Mortar's second season will open with *I Am Montana* by **Samuel D. Hunter**, directed by company member **Rachel Edwards Harvith**, featuring Artistic Director **Derek Garza** and Artistic Associate **Sentell Harper**. The production will run **April 8-May 1, 2011**, at the Athenaeum Theatre, 2936 N. Southport. Tickets \$11-\$20.

Following is the world premiere of *Mother Bear* by **Jayne McGhan** directed by company member **Jason Boat**. The production will run **May 27-June 19, 2011**, at the Athenaeum Theatre, 2936 N. Southport. Tickets \$20.

Additional programming includes a special reading of *Mr. Welfare* by **Wendell Etherly**, directed by company member **Jason Boat** and dramaturged by Literary Manager **Dana Lynn Formby** as part of Mortar's new **Graphite Series**. This two-night event will run **Monday March 21st and Tuesday March 22nd, 2011** at **Steep Theatre**, 1115 W. Berwyn. Tickets \$5.

I Am Montana

by Samuel D. Hunter
Directed by Rachel Edwards Harvith
April 8 – May 1, 2011

Quick snapshot:

After a traumatic stint in the Israeli Army, Eben returns home to Montana and must travel cross-country with coworkers to the national headquarters of his mega-retail employer, Valumart. But his plans go far beyond a simple presentation on the future of retail.

Location

Athenaeum Theatre
2936 N. Southport Ave.

Dates

Preview: Thursday, April 7th

Opening Night:

Friday, April 8th, at 7:30 p.m.

Performance Run:

April 8 – May 1, 2011

Curtain Times

Thursday, Friday and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday matinees at 3:00 p.m.

Tickets

\$11-20, available online/at box office

Mother Bear

by Jayme McGhan
Directed by Jason Boat
May 27 – June 19, 2011

Quick snapshot:

A union organizer attempts to recruit a gang of truckers and their notorious leader in the Utah desert. Mother Bear is a hard-hitting, plot-twisting, pedal-to-the-floor haul down the darkest miles of America's highways.

Location

Athenaeum Theatre
2936 N. Southport Ave.

Dates

Preview: Thursday, May 26th

Opening Night:

Friday, May 27th, at 7:30 p.m.

Performance Run:

May 27 – June 19, 2011

Curtain Times

Thursday, Friday and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday matinees at 3:00 p.m.

Tickets

\$12-20, available online/at box office

The Graphite Series: Mr. Welfare

by Wendell Etherly
Directed by Jason Boat
March 21 – 22, 2011

Quick snapshot:

During one of the most volatile periods in Black America, the 1960s, a Chicago tavern owner gives in to his alderman and provides shelter to some of the local homeless.

Location

Steep Theatre
1115 W. Berwyn Ave.

Dates & Times

Monday, March 21st, 2011,
at 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 22nd, 2011,
at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets

\$5 – available at the door

I Am Montana

by Samuel D. Hunter

Directed by Rachel Edwards Harvith

April 8 – May 1, 2011

How do you fight an enemy that doesn't attack with missiles but with low low prices; that isn't plowing over your country with tanks, but with concrete?

I Am Montana was originally developed at the Iowa New Play Festival and has received critical acclaim in productions around the U.S. and in London. This will be the Midwest Premiere of this riveting script from Samuel D. Hunter.

Eben Shamir has just returned home to Montana from a traumatic stint in the Israeli army. Back to work at his minimum-wage job with retail giant Valumart, he begins a cross-country journey with coworkers Tommy, his best friend since childhood, and Dirk, a meth-addicted new employee, to the national Valumart convention. Navigating between fantasy and reality, the present and a haunted past, Tommy learns that Eben has much bigger plans for the Valumart convention than a simple presentation on the future of retail. *I Am Montana* is a gripping examination of the position minimum-wage workers hold in an increasingly mega-store occupied America.

“Samuel D. Hunter has written a remarkable play which metaphorically punches its audience in the chest from opening moment to emotionally-moving end.”

- Kevin Quarmby, British Theatre Guide

About the Playwright:

Samuel D. Hunter is a graduate of NYU, the Iowa Playwrights Workshop, and Juilliard. Recent productions include A BRIGHT NEW BOISE (Partial Comfort at the Wild Project, NYC) JACK'S PRECIOUS MOMENT (Page 73 Productions at 59E59, NYC), FIVE GENOCIDES (Clubbed Thumb at the Ohio Theater, NYC), I AM MONTANA (Arcola Theatre, London). His new play NORWAY will be produced regionally at the Phoenix Theater of Indianapolis and Boise Contemporary Theater in Winter 2011. His plays have been developed at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference, Bay Area Playwrights Festival, PlayPenn, Ojai Playwrights Conference, the Lark Playwrights Workshop, Juilliard, LAByrnth Theater Company, Rattlestick, Seven Devils Playwrights Conference, and elsewhere. Awards: 2008-2009 PONY Fellowship from the Lark Theater, two Lincoln Center Le Compte du Nuoy Awards, others. He is a member of Ars Nova's Play Group and The Civilians' R&D Group, and he has taught at Fordham University, Rutgers University and The University of Iowa. Internationally, his work has been translated into Spanish and presented in Mexico City, and he has worked in the West Bank with Ashtar Theatre of Ramallah and Ayyam al-Masrah of Hebron. At Ashtar, he co-wrote THE ERA OF WHALES which was performed in Ramallah and Istanbul. A native of northern Idaho, Sam lives in New York with his partner, dramaturg John Baker.

MORTAR
THEATRE
season 2

Ticket prices:

\$20 - Regular ticket

\$18 - Senior ticket

\$15 - Student ticket

\$12 - Veterans

\$12 - Group tickets

(10 or more)

\$7.25/hr

Thursday Nights:

Every Thursday during the run of *I Am Montana*, tickets will cost their equivalent in minimum wage. We calculate this by the run time of the show. If the show runs 90 minutes, tickets would cost \$10.87 (\$7.25/hr national minimum wage x 1.5 hrs running time).

Available online:

MortarTheatreCompany.org

By phone:

1-800-982-2787

Box Office:

Athenaeum Theatre
2936 N. Southport

Special Event:

Theater Thursdays with the League of Chicago Theatres
Thursday, April 28th

Details will be announced on MortarTheatreCompany.org.

Mother Bear

by Jayme McGhan
Directed by Jason Boat
May 27 – June 19, 2011

Location:

Athenaeum Theatre, 2936 N. Southport Ave., Chicago, IL 60657

Dates:

Preview: Thursday, May 26th
Opening Night: Friday, May 27th, at 7:30 p.m.
Performance Run: May 27 – June 19, 2011

Curtain Times:

Thursday, Friday and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.
Sunday matinees at 3:00 p.m.

In a land pioneered by the violence of our ancestors, can progress and pacifism coexist? Can bloody force be a tool of the moral?

This new script from Chicago playwright Jayme McGhan played to sold-out audiences at Stage Left's LeapFest in 2010. Mortar Theatre is excited to produce the world premiere of Mother Bear in its second season.

Freely, an idealistic young lawyer and salt man for a startup truckers union, has come to Coyote Pass Truck Stop in Green River, Utah, in the guise of a long-haul trucker. His goal: to recruit Mother, the most feared and respected man on the road, along with his Disciples, a gang of notorious thugs who are suspected of hijacking trucks from Mexico and reselling the dope and weapons they contain, to join the union and strengthen the transportation industry. As the eighteen wheels spin and true identities and motivations are revealed, Freely must do battle to win the allegiance of a man who appears to have no allegiances. Mother Bear is a hard-hitting, plot-twisting, pedal-to-the-floor haul down the darkest miles of America's highways.

About the Playwright:

Jayme McGhan is a Chicago-based playwright originally hailing from Minneapolis. He is the author of over a dozen full-length plays including THE FISHERMAN, HELLFIRE, THE METHUSELAH TREE, and THE SWEET STUFF. His plays have been produced and developed at theatres across the country including Irish Repertory Theatre (Off-Broadway), The Kennedy Center, Washington Shakespeare Co., Cleveland Public Theatre, Stage Left Theatre, Hot City Theatre, Yellow Tree Theatre, Cockroach Theatre, Nevada Conservatory Theatre, Southern Appalachian Repertory, Forestburgh Playhouse, Chased By an Elephant Theatre Co., and many more. Four of his plays are published. He currently serves as an Assistant Professor of Theatre at Concordia University, Chicago. He is the former Regional Representative of the Dramatists Guild to the Twin Cities and remains a proud member of The Dramatists Guild, Chicago Dramatists, and the Playwrights Center. He holds an M.F.A in Playwriting from The University of Nevada, Las Vegas.



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Available online:

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By phone:

1-800-982-2787

Box Office:

Athenaeum Theatre
2936 N. Southport

The Graphite Series: **Mr. Welfare**

by Wendell Etherly
Directed by Jason Boat
March 21 – 22, 2011



Location:

Steep Theatre, 1115 W. Berwyn Ave. Chicago, IL 60640

Dates:

Monday, March 21st, 2011, at 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, March 22nd, 2011, at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets for the Graphite Series:

\$5 – available at the door

As a theatre devoted to the development of new work, Mortar Theatre Company has created **The Graphite Series**, an ongoing series of play readings to highlight new works and new voices in the Chicago theatre community. Mortar Theatre will devote resources and support in the development of new scripts culminating in their presentation to the public. The first event in this series will be a reading of **Mr. Welfare** from up-and-coming Chicago playwright **Wendell Etherly**, directed by company member **Jason Boat** and dramaturged by Literary Manager **Dana Lynn Formby** at Steep Theatre, March 21-22, 2011.

During one of the most volatile periods in Black America, the 1960s, a Chicago tavern owner gives in to his alderman and provides shelter to some of the local homeless. **Mr. Welfare** is a powerful snapshot of a turning point in our history that asks questions of accountability for yourself and your community.

About the playwright:

Wendell Etherly is the Co-Chairman of the Black Playwrights Initiative, founded by the Black Ensemble Theater, and the Chairman of Organizational Development at the African American Arts Alliance in Chicago. Some of his works include: THE RED SUMMER, which was selected to the 2007 National Black Theatre Festival, and recipient of the 2008 Illinois Arts Fellowship Award for outstanding script works; MR. WELFARE, which was selected to the 2009 National Black Theatre Festival; and 2009 Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference Finalist. His play CARNAL SAVIOR opened in its world premiere in April 2007 at the Live Bait Theater. That year, it was a candidate for the Pulitzer Prize for Dramatic works.

About Mortar Theatre

Mortar Theatre Company is a collaborative group of actors, directors, designers and playwrights committed to making socially conscious theatre and championing new works.

Mortar's mission is to engage community dialogue by lifting up and exploring stories of everyday heroes who shape our society.

In its 2010 inaugural season, Mortar enjoyed a successful year of new works written and directed by company members—*Inherit the Whole* by Dana Lynn Formby and *Under America* by Jacob Juntunen. And in November of 2010, Mortar presented a performance piece at Steppenwolf's Explore Series.

“As long as Mortar Theatre continues to put out a high level of execution, this could be a group to watch for years to come.”

-Paul Cosca, SteadStyleChicago.com

