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PRESS RELEASE

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JAMES SHERMAN, DENNIS ZACEK MARK 25 YEARS OF COLLABORATION WITH *JACOB AND JACK*, A WORLD PREMIERE BACKSTAGE COMEDY SET IN CURRENT TIMES, AND THE HEY DEY OF YIDDISH THEATER

CHICAGO, April 29, 2010 – The time is now. The setting is a downtown Chicago theater, where Jack Shore, a popular TV personality, is appearing one night only in a tribute to his grandfather, Jacob Shemerinsky, great star of the Yiddish Theater.

However, backstage in his dressing room, Jack is wrestling with his challenges as a TV actor, who thought he was only performing in a small staged reading, while in fact an audience of thousands awaits him.

Meanwhile, 75 years in the past, in the very same dressing room, Jack's grandfather Jacob is wrestling with a similar situation – fading fortunes and slow ticket sales for his touring production of a Yiddish classic.

Thus begins *Jacob and Jack*, a world premiere comedy by Victory Gardens Playwrights Ensemble Member **James Sherman**, directed by Artistic Director **Dennis Zacek**. As actors, stage hands, ingénues, jealous wives and Jewish mothers past and present rush from room to room, the audience is transported back and forth through time. And with each slam of a dressing room door, one thing remains certain – in both the Yiddish and contemporary theater, the show must go on.

Jacob and Jack begins previews May 14, 2010 at the Victory Gardens Biograph Theater, 2433 N. Lincoln Avenue, Chicago. **Press opening is Monday, May 24 at 7:30 pm.** Regular performances continue through June 20. Tickets are \$20-\$48. Call the Victory Gardens box office, **773.871.3000**, or purchase online at www.victorygardens.org.

Jacob and Jack, winner of this year's Streisand Festival of New Jewish Plays, marks an extraordinary 25-year creative collaboration between Sherman and Zacek, Victory Gardens dynamic duo of Jewish comedy. Zacek and Sherman originally teamed in 1985 to produce *The God of Isaac*, which quickly earned Sherman the nickname "The Neil Simon of Lincoln Avenue." *Jacob and Jack*, a true farce echoing Sherman's most popular VG hits *Beau Jest*, *Jest a Second* and *Relatively Close*, is their unprecedented 13th world premiere comedy together.

"The golden age of Yiddish Theatre lasted only forty-odd years, but it had tremendous impact on Jewish American culture and an immeasurable influence on American Theatre," says **Sherman**. "I have a continuing fascination with stories about how traditions and values are passed on from one generation to the next, and *Jacob and Jack* tells the story of not just Yiddish Theatre actors but their descendants."

Some of Chicago's favorite actors are working double duty in *Jacob and Jack*, including **Craig Spidle** as Jacob/Jack, **Roslyn Alexander** as Esther/Hannah, **Janet Ulrich Brooks** as Lisa/Leah, **Daniel Cantor** as Ted/Abe, **Andrew Keltz** as Don/Moishe, and **Laura Scheinbaum** as Robin/Rachel. Designers include **Mary Griswold**, set; **Carol Blanchard**, costumes; **Scott Miller**, sound; **Jesse Klug**, lights; and **Grant Sabin**, Props. **Rebecca Green** is stage manager.

Victory Gardens production of *Jacob and Jack* is supported by a grant from the Seigle Family Foundation.

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The creative team behind *Jacob and Jack*

James Sherman (playwright) is observing 25 years of collaboration with Victory Gardens. Premieres at VG include *Magic Time*, *The God of Isaac*, *Mr. 80%*, *The Escape Artist*, *Beau Jest*, *This Old Man Came Rolling Home*, *Jest A Second!*, *Romance in D*, *From Door to Door*, *The Old Man's Friend*, *Affluenza!*, *Half and Half*, and *Relatively Close*. His plays have been produced all across the United States and in many countries around the world. In 2006, Sherman directed the movie of *Beau Jest* starring Lainie Kazan, Seymour Cassel, and Robyn Cohen. The movie was screened at film festivals in the U.S in Miami, San Diego, Palm Beach, Washington, D.C., Charlotte, Houston, Salt Lake City, and Fairfax. The movie was also screened at international festivals in Vancouver, Tel Aviv, and Dusseldorf. Sherman currently teaches at Columbia College and DePaul University. He has been the recipient of fellowships from The MacDowell Colony, the Ragdale Foundation, The Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and Yaddo. His play *Half and Half* has been published by Samuel French, Inc. marking the tenth play that Sherman has had published in a professional acting edition.

Dennis Zacek (director) has held the position of artistic director at Victory Gardens for 30 years, and recently accepted the Actor's Equity Association's (AEA) Spirit Recognition Award, given to institutions that "have made non-traditional casting a way of life." He also received the 2005 Jeff Award for Outstanding Achievement in Chicago Equity Theatre. He, his wife Marcelle McVay, and the theater are co-recipients of the 2001 Tony Award® for Outstanding Regional Theatre. Zacek and McVay were also honored with the 1999 Rosetta Lenoire Award from Actors' Equity and the 1998 Sidney R. Yates Arts Advocacy Award from the Illinois Arts Alliance Foundation. He is also the recipient of the 2004 Artistic Leadership Award from the League of Chicago Theatres. He has directed more than 250 productions in his career, including, most recently, the Chicago premiere of *Blackbird* by David Harrower, the world premiere of Jeffrey Sweet's *Class Dismissed*, James Sherman's *Relatively Close*, the Midwest premiere of *A Park in Our House* by Nilo Cruz, the world premieres of *Cynical Weathers* by Douglas Post, *Denmark* by Charles Smith, the inaugural production at Victory Gardens' new home at the Biograph, *Symmetry* by David Field, *The Family Gold* by Annie Reiner, *Affluenza!* and *The Old Man's Friend* by James Sherman, *Unspoken Prayers* by Claudia Allen, *The Action Against Sol Schumann* and *Flyovers* by Jeffrey Sweet, and others. Additional projects include Marisha Chamberlain's *Scheherazade* (National Winner of the FDG/CBS competition), John Olive's *Clara's Play* (production and direction award, Academy of Theater Artists and Friends), and James Sherman's *Mr. 80%* (direction award, Academy of Theater Artists and Friends). Zacek directed Arthur Cantor's production of James Sherman's *Beau Jest* at the Lambs Theater in New York, where it holds the record as the longest-running show in the history of the theater. Other New York credits include Lonnie Carter's *The Sovereign State of Boogedy Boogedy*, presented by Woody King's New Federal Theater, and Charles Smith's *Jelly Belly*, which was produced by the New Federal Theater. Zacek is a professor emeritus of Loyola University and was included in 2005 in *Utne* magazine's first-ever list of "Artists Who Will Shake the World."

Full performance schedule

Previews of *Jacob and Jack* are May 14-23, 2010: Tuesday through Thursday at 7:30 pm; Friday and Saturday at 8 pm; Sunday at 3 pm. Previews are \$20-\$37. **Press opening is Monday, May 24 at 7:30 pm.** Regular performances run through June 20: Tuesday through Thursday at 7:30 pm; Friday at 8 pm; Saturday at 5 pm and 8:30 pm; Sunday at 3 pm. Added matinees are Wednesday, June 9 and June 16 at 2 pm. No evening performance Tuesday, May 25. Regular performances are \$20-\$48.

Performances are at the Victory Gardens Biograph Theater, 2433 N. Lincoln Avenue, in the heart of Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood. For tickets and information, call the Victory Gardens box office, **773.871.3000** (tty: 773.871.0682), email tickets@victorygardens.org, or visit www.victorygardens.org. Ask the box office about student, senior, Access, 20 for \$20, and rush discounts. For group discounts, call **773.328.2141**.

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Learn more about *Jacob and Jack* at these special events

OPEN REHEARSAL - Thursday, May 6 6 pm

Enjoy a behind-the-scenes peek at rehearsal, followed by a talkback with the artists. Complimentary admission.

HUMANITIES NIGHT - Thursday, March 20 6 pm discussion; 7:30 pm show

Leslie Shook, Theatre Manager and Head of the Theatre Management Program at DePaul University, will give a presentation on the history of the Blackstone/ Merle Reskin Theatre where *Jacob and Jack* is set.

HUMANITIES NIGHT - Thursday, May 27 6 pm discussion; 7:30 pm show

David Y. Chack, President of the Association for Jewish Theatre, will talk about the history of Yiddish Theater.

HAPPY HOUR - Friday, June 4 at 6:30pm

Join us for a pre-show happy hour featuring music from one of Chicago's own Klezmer bands.

POST SHOW DISCUSSIONS

Join members of the cast and VG Artistic Team in a post-play discussion after every Wednesday performance.

ACCESS PERFORMANCES

Audio descriptions for patrons who are blind or have low vision

Friday, June 11 at 8 pm

Sunday, June 20 at 3 pm

On-stage touch tour begins 1-1/2 hour before the show. Call 773.871.3000 to reserve.

Word for word captioning for patrons who are hearing impaired

Wednesday, June 9 at 2pm

Friday, June 18 at 8 pm

Saturday, June 19 at 5 pm

Sign language interpretation for patrons who are hearing impaired

Friday, June 18 at 8 pm

Victory Gardens is the winner, Best Accessible Theater, Deaf Illinois Awards 2009. Interpreting is by Deaf Communication by Innovation, Raymond Rodgers, Sign Master. See www.victorygardens.org and click on "Enhance your visit" for information and other Access services including large print and Braille programs, assisted listening devices, and artist development workshops.

Logistics and Amenities

Parking

\$11 valet parking is available for all performances. Discounted parking is available one block south at Children's Memorial Hospital for all shows except weekday matinees (no overnights). Metered and street parking is available, but mind the neighborhood parking restrictions.

Public transit

By CTA train, take the Red, Purple and Brown lines to the Fullerton stop. Walk east on Fullerton to Lincoln, then north 1/2 block to the theater. The #8 Halsted, #11 Lincoln, #37 Sedgwick/Ogden, and #74 Fullerton CTA buses all stop at the corner of Fullerton and Halsted, 1/2 block south of the theater. See transitchicago.com for times and routes.

Pre- and post-show dining

See www.victorygardens.org for a list of Victory Gardens' neighborhood dining partners. Each is within walking distance of the Biograph, and all offer a special discount to patrons who present a Victory Gardens ticket stub.

About Victory Gardens Theater

Victory Gardens Theater is home to the bold voices of world premiere theater. The company features the work of its own 14-member Playwrights Ensemble, as well as that of exciting playwrights who are changing theater in the U.S. and abroad. Since its founding in 1974, the company has produced more world premieres than any other Chicago theater, a commitment recognized nationally when Victory Gardens received the 2001 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre. The company's dedication to developing, supporting and producing new work makes Victory Gardens an American Center for New Plays.

In 2006, Victory Gardens successfully completed an \$11.8 million renovation of Chicago's famed Biograph Theater, and moved two blocks north from its longtime venue at 2257 N. Lincoln Avenue, to its beautiful new home in one of Chicago's most celebrated historic landmarks. Renamed the Victory Gardens Biograph Theater, the new venue opened with one, state-of-the-art 299-seat mainstage which has greatly expanded the company's artistic flexibility, while enhancing Victory Gardens' ability to welcome patrons old and new.

Last summer, Victory Gardens completed the second phase of renovation at the Biograph, building an intimate, new, 109-seat studio theater on the second floor of the Biograph. On March 1, 2010, at a special launch event for Victory Gardens' new, \$1 million "*Campaign for Growth*", Victory Gardens' new studio will be officially named the Richard Christiansen Theater, in honor of the *Chicago Tribune* chief critic emeritus and longtime champion of Chicago's live theater scene. Visit www.victorygardens.org/campaignforgrowth for more details.

Working with a \$3.1 million annual budget in 2009-2010, Victory Gardens continues to expand its artistic and institutional boundaries under the guidance of Artistic Director **Dennis Zacek**, Executive Director **Jan Kallish**, Associate Artistic Director **Sandy Shinner**, and Board President **Jeffrey Rappin**.

Victory Gardens Theater is supported by the **National Endowment for the Arts**, **Illinois Arts Council (IAC)**, a stage agency, **Illinois Humanities Council**, and is partially supported by a **CityArts Program 4 Grant from the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs**. Major funders also include the **John T. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation**, **Chicago Community Trust**, **Shubert Foundation**, **Wallace Foundation**, **Polk Bros. Foundation**, **Joyce Foundation**, **Allstate Insurance Company**, **Alphawood Foundation**, **Motorola Foundation**, **REAM Foundation**, **Edgerton Foundation**, and **Crown Family Philanthropies**. Additional funding is provided by the **Lloyd A. Fry Foundation**, **Kraft Foods**, **Prince Charitable Trusts**, **Sara Lee Foundation**, **Seigle Family Foundation**, **Charles and M.R. Shapiro Foundation**, and by **3Arts**, **Harry S. Black and Allon Fuller Fund**, **Charles H. and Bertha L. Boothroyd Foundation**, **Elizabeth Cheney Foundation**, **Col. L.C. Christensen Foundation**, **John R. Halligan Fund**, **Illinois Tool Works (ITW)**, **James S. Kemper Foundation**, **Albert Pick, Jr. Fund**, **Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation**, and **Wrightwood Neighbors Association**.

For complete information, visit www.victorygardens.org.

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