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Jon Ferguson joins Southern staff in new artistic role

MINNEAPOLIS, MN – Twin Cities theatrical director Jon Ferguson has been named theatre programming director of the Southern Theater. The new artistic position will begin in November on the heels of Ferguson's premiere of *Animal Farm* at the Southern.

Bringing his experience as a director, play-maker, theatre educator, and actor, Ferguson is originally from Durham, in the northeast of England. He has worked with some of the leading physical theatre, ensemble, and clown companies in the UK, including Hoipolloi, Told by an Idiot, Trading Faces and The John Wright Company. Garnering acclaim in both local and international circles, he has received the Time Out London Critic's Choice Award and was named a 2005 *City Pages* Artist of the Year, among many awards. Ferguson was also co-founder and co-artistic director of Invention Arts, the city art center in Bath, England, a center for visual art and performance. Ferguson says he chose to make the Twin Cities his home because of the vibrancy and breadth of the artistic community, with opportunities for both new and established artists to produce original work.

Southern Theater President Patricia Speelman said that the theatre programming director is charged with recognizing how the Southern fits into the larger performing arts community, and how that larger picture can best be brought back into the Southern.

"Jon understands that we have a reputation for being an incubator, a nurturer, of new and experimental work," Speelman said. "He is well-versed in, and articulate about, the kinds of theatre that will sit well in the Southern's unique space."

Ferguson said that in 2002, he walked into the Southern Theater to perform in the weekly event, Ball's Cabaret. Describing the experience that so many audience members and artists have had, he said he was struck by the impact of the space.

"My experience in that moment," he said of seeing the Southern's distinctive proscenium arch for the first time, "was thinking, 'This is where I want to do my work.'" Ferguson knows from personal experience that the Southern stage serves as an inspiration for many artists: "On the one hand, it can be a grand palace, but it can also be a raw cave—it's alive, it has a life. I like to think that being in that space feeds you." Ferguson added, "In fact, the beauty and draw of the Southern Theater contributed to my decision to move to Minneapolis."

In 2007, he premiered *Or the White Whale*, his collaboratively created adaptation of the novel *Moby Dick*, on the Southern's stage. In February of 2008 he premiered his original play *You're My Favorite Kind of Pretty* at the Southern. The upcoming premiere of *Animal Farm* this fall marks his third production at the Southern.

The theatre programming director is the first announced of three programming positions new this year to the organization. The directors of dance, theatre, and music represent a strategic investment in maintaining and building upon the Southern's history of making bold interdisciplinary program choices. Speelman said that the positions will be tied closely to each other in the development and management of artistic programming at the Southern Theater: "No one operates in a vacuum, so all programming decisions will be made in concert with all the programming directors," she noted.

Ferguson envisions that the work he will help bring to the Southern will be "artistically challenging for the artist; engaging, accessible and thought provoking for the audience; and about the discovery and exploration of new ways of creating." He said he hopes to give all artists at all levels in their careers the opportunity to submit their current "ultimate" projects.

"I want more people to start thinking about the possibility of developing work at the Southern and presenting work at the Southern," he said, "once you start to believe in the possibility of that, you then get the chance to start imagining your artistic vision more fully, and that's where your own, personal great art can begin."

Jon Ferguson's biography

Jon Ferguson is from Durham, in the Northeast of England. He is a director, play-maker, theater educator and actor. He trained in London with leading international physical theatre practitioner John Wright and holds a BA Honors degree in Acting from Middlesex University. He has worked with some of the leading physical theater, ensemble and clown companies in the UK including Hoipolloi, Told by an Idiot, Trading Faces and The John Wright Company. Jon's independent work as a director and play-maker includes: *Animal Farm* (Southern Theater), *Bury My Heart at Dumb Ass Cowboy* (The 2008 New York Clown Theater Festival), *You're my Favorite Kind of Pretty* (Southern Theater), *Or The White Whale* (Southern Theater), *The Sad and Lonesome Story of What's His Name* (Sabes JCC), *Ligustrum Vulgare* (Bryant Lake Bowl), *We Are Ugly But We Have the Music* (Bryant Lake Bowl), *Please Don't Blow Up Mr. Boban* (2005 Minnesota Fringe Festival and The Loring Playhouse), *Everything and Nothing all at the Same Time* (2004 Minnesota Fringe Festival), *Shakespeare for Breakfast* (Edinburgh, London, Warsaw, Toronto, Winnipeg, Minneapolis, Edmonton & Victoria). Jon was named "2005 *City Pages* Artist of the Year," and his production *Please Don't Blow Up Mr. Boban*, with Live Action Set, was chosen by the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* as the "Outstanding Experimental Theater Production of 2005" and named "Best Stage Production" by the Minneapolis *City Pages* - Best of the Twin Cities 2006. Other awards include: "Time Out London Critic's Choice", "Sunday Times Ensemble Award" and "Best Comedy Awards". His recent production *You're My Favorite Kind of Pretty* was named one of the top ten plays in Minneapolis in 2008 by *Twin Cities Daily Planet*. Jon has taught physical theater, clowning, and collaborative play creation throughout the UK and US, including teaching extensively for The Theatre Royal Bath, The Bristol Old Vic, Stages Theatre Company, St. Paul Conservatory of Performing Arts, the Guthrie Theater and the University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater BFA Actor Training Program. He has developed work at Theatre de la Jeune Lune in Minneapolis and with Told by an Idiot and Hoipolloi Theatre in the UK. Jon's personal artistic focus is on the collaborative creation of new work for the theater, and the discovery of new ways of creating.

Southern Theater mission and artistic statement

The Southern Theater cultivates artistic exploration by providing a vibrant home for performance, fostering a multiplicity of voices and catalyzing connections among artists and audience.

The Southern presents and produces performance characterized by innovation and originality. We value connections to the local community and celebrate artwork that holds potential for transformative exchange. On stage, we are unyielding in our commitment to the highest levels of professionalism and artistic integrity.

For more information on the Southern, please visit www.southerntheater.org or call 612.340.0155.

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