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COURT THEATRE PRESENTS
WHAT THE BUTLER SAW
BY JOE ORTON
DIRECTED BY SEAN GRANEY

Chicago, IL— Court Theatre presents Joe Orton's classic farce *What the Butler Saw*, directed by **Sean Graney**. The production runs November 8-December 9, 2007, at Court Theatre, 5535 S. Ellis Avenue in Hyde Park. **The official press opening is Saturday, November 17, 2007, at 8:00 p.m.**

Wild, risqué and ferociously playful, Joe Orton's classic farce has become one of the seminal works of modern comedy. When a psychiatrist invents a series of increasingly outrageous lies to cover up his attempts to seduce his young secretary, all manner of pandemonium breaks out in the ward. A state inspector, a philandering wife, bellboys, policemen, and some missing bits from a statue of Sir Winston Churchill are caught up in the mix, creating a gleefully hilarious comedy of circumstance. Chicago's own rising star Sean Graney will direct, making his Court Theatre debut.

"It is thrilling to be able to bring Sean to Court. It's fantastic to work with a director who's at the top of his game, one who brings a real sense of abandon, revelry, and pleasure to the work. Sean's directorial precision and singular vision are a perfect match for Court's unique approach to the classics," comments Newell.

The cast includes **Mary Beth Fisher** (Mrs. Prentice), **Joe Foust** (Dr. Rance), **Mechelle Moe** (Geraldine Barclay), **Blake Montgomery** (Dr. Prentice), **Eric Slater** (Sargeant Match), and **JB Waterman** (Nicolas Beckett).

The designers are **Kevin Depinet** (scenic), **Ray Nardelli** (sound), **Heather Gilbert** (lighting), **Jaqueline Firkins** (costume) and **Tanera Marshall** (dialect coach). **Jack Tamburri** is the dramaturg. **Sara Gammage** is the production stage manager.

Joe Orton (*Playwright*), one of the most influential playwrights of the 20th century, left school at age 16 and struggled for several years as an amateur actor before gaining admittance to the prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. There he met Kenneth Halliwell, with whom he developed a life-long partnership that spanned romance, crime and art.

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Taking up where Orton's schooling had left off, Halliwell encouraged Orton to study the important works of ancient and modern drama. Halliwell, seven years Orton's senior, and whiny, heavy, and balding where Orton was charming, athletic, and handsome, supported the pair on a small inheritance. Always in pursuit of free entertainment, Orton and Halliwell began embellishing the dust jackets of books borrowed from the public library and returning the altered texts to the stacks. In 1962, they were jailed for six months for their antics and, while never denying the crimes, remained convinced that their punishment had more to do with their open homosexuality than with any crime.

The pair also collaborated on several unpublished novels, but it wasn't until Orton struck out on his own that he met with any success, a fact that would eventually alienate and enrage his partner. His first play, *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, followed a murderer as he enticed a brother-sister team to help him cover up his crime by appealing sexually to each. *Mr. Sloane* opened in London in 1964 and on Broadway the following year. Orton's sophomore effort, the raucous crime comedy *Loot*, debuted in Wimbledon in 1965, where it was met with disdain from audiences and critics alike. Frustrated, Orton revised the work significantly and when it opened in London the following year the improved work attracted enthusiastic crowds and garnered several awards. *Loot* remains a popular favorite that is considered one of Orton's best.

What the Butler Saw was Orton's final work, completed just a month before his death at the hands of his longtime partner. On August 9, 1967, Halliwell's anger peaked and after striking his partner nine times in the head with a hammer, Halliwell shed his blood-soaked clothes and ingested 22 barbiturates, taking his own life. His suicide note read: *If you read his diary, all will be explained. K.H. P.S. Especially the latter part.*

Sean Graney (*Director*) is the Artistic Director and Founder of The Hypocrites Theatre Company, and has directed most of the Hypocrites' productions. He is the recipient of the NEA/ TCG Career Development Program for Directors. Originally from Boston, Graney received his BFA in Theatre and Writing from Emerson College. He received a Joseph Jefferson Citation for his direction of Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*, and was named Chicago's Best Avant-Garde Director by *Chicago Magazine*, and Chicagoan of the Year for theatre by the *Chicago Tribune*, both in 2004. He teaches theatre classes at the University of Chicago and Columbia College Chicago. He has worked with Redmoon, Collaboraction, the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, The Side Project, Chicago Children's Theatre and Steppenwolf.

Mary Beth Fisher (*Mrs. Prentice*) has appeared previously at Court in *Arcadia*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Travesties*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Other Chicago credits include: *The Clean House*, *Dinner with Friends*, *Heartbreak House*, *Spinning into Butter*, *Design for Living*, *The Guys*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Marvin's Room* (Goodman), *The Dresser* and *The Memory of Water* (Steppenwolf), *Theatre District* (About Face), and *My Own Stranger* (Writer's). Her NY credits include *Frank's Home* (Playwrights Horizons/Goodman), *Boy Gets Girl* (Drama League Honoree, Drama Desk, and Lucile Lortel nominations), *The Radical Mystique*, *By the Beautiful Sea* (Manhattan Theatre Club), *The Night of the Iguana* (Roundabout), *Extremities* (Westside Arts), and *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?* (Promenade). Ms. Fisher has worked in regional theatres all over the country, most recently in *King Lear* at Milwaukee Rep. Her TV/FILM credits include "Without a Trace", "Numb3rs", "NYPD Blue", "Profiler", "Early Edition", "Turks", "To Have & To Hold", *Dragonfly*, *Trauma*, and the award-winning short film *Safe Storage*. Earlier this fall, Ms. Fisher taught a Master Acting Class for the graduate program at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX.

Joe Foust (*Dr. Rance*) returns to Court Theatre having last appeared in *Endgame*. Other credits include *The Beard of Avon* (Goodman), *Mother Courage and Her Children* (Steppenwolf), *Kabuki Medea* (Wisdom Bridge), *The Seagull*, *Major Barbara* (Remy Bumppo), *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (Next), *Santaland Diaries* (Theatre Wit), thirteen productions with Chicago Shakespeare, most recently *Marionette Macbeth* which traveled to New York City, and acting and directing for nine seasons at Peninsula Players. He was a founding member of Defiant Theatre where credits include directing and co-writing *Action Movie: The Play* and *Ubu Raw*.

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Mechelle Moe (*Geraldine Barclay*) is making her debut at Court Theatre. Most recently, she appeared in Timeline Theater's *Paradise Lost* and *The Children's Hour* as well as The Hypocrites' *The Bald Soprano*. In 2003, Mechelle was awarded both a Joseph Jefferson Citation and an After Dark Award for Best Actress for her portrayal of the Young Woman in Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal*. Mechelle is a founding member of The Hypocrites, and has worked with various companies including Writers' Theater, The Goodman, Steppenwolf, Prop THTR, Factory, Lifeline, Collaboraction and A Red Orchid.

Blake Montgomery (*Dr. Prentice*) is the founder and artistic director of The Building Stage where he has directed *Hamlet* and conceived/directed three original works - *Dustbowl Gothic*, *Moby-Dick*, and *Noir*. He spent a few years working with Redmoon Theater, performing in *Nina*, *Seagull*, and *Salao*. Blake trained at the Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris, the Dell'Arte School of Physical Theater in Northern California, with Kari Margolis (Corporeal Mime), and Ronlin Foreman (Clown).

Eric Slater (*Sergeant Match*) is making his first appearance at Court. He was most recently seen as Honus Wagner in the Chicago Children's Theatre production of *Honus & Me* at Goodman Theatre. Other Chicago credits include: *Revenge of the Space Pandas* also at Goodman Theater; *Spite For Spite*, *Butley*, and *Misalliance* at Writer's Theatre Chicago; *Major Barbara* at Remy Bumppo Theatre Co.; *Measure For Measure* at Next Theatre; *Hunchback* at Redmoon Theatre; and *Twelfth Night* at Nobel Fool Theatricals among many others. A company member of the Rivendell Theatre Ensemble Eric has appeared in *Silence*, *Expecting Isabelle*, and *Self Defense*, which was co-produced by the Steppenwolf Theatre Ensemble. Film credits include *Inside* directed by Scott McCall and *Melting Crayons* that he also produced.

JB Waterman (*Nicholas Beckett*) was last seen on the Chicago stage as Joe in *Angels in America* with The Hypocrites. Other credits include *The True Ballad of Fall's Blessings* (Strawdog Theatre Co.), *Equus* (The Hypocrites), *The Pyrates* (Defiant Theatre), and *Fraulein Else* (Court Theatre, Understudy). He has trained at school at Steppenwolf. He lives in Los Angeles.

Previews are **November 8 – November 16, 2007**. The opening press performance is on **Saturday, November 17, 2007, at 8:00 p.m.** The production runs through **December 9, 2007**. Curtain times are Wednesdays and Thursdays at 7:30 p.m.; Fridays and Saturdays at 8:00 p.m. with Saturday matinees at 3 p.m. beginning November 24; Sundays at 2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. There will be no performance on Thursday, November 22, 2007.

Ticket prices are \$32 to \$38 for preview performances; \$38 to \$54 for regular run performances. Tickets are available at the Box Office, 5535 S. Ellis Avenue, Chicago; 773.753.4472 or online at www.CourtTheatre.org. Student and senior discounts available. Groups of 10 or more may purchase tickets by calling Milan Pejnovich at 773.834.3243.

What the Butler Saw is sponsored by Grant Thornton, LLP, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and Winston & Strawn, LLP. Additional production support provided by The Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation and The Marion M. Lloyd Court Theatre Fund.

Court Theatre, the professional theatre in residence at the University of Chicago, is located at 5535 S. Ellis Ave. in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood. Five, four and three play subscriptions to Court's 2007/2008 season range from \$87 to \$230 and are on sale now. To purchase a subscription or to receive more information, call the Court Theatre Box Office at (773) 753-4472, or visit Court's website at www.CourtTheatre.org.

Court Theatre's 53rd Season, under the leadership of Artistic Director Charles Newell and Executive Director Dawn Helsing, is generously supported by Richard and Barbara Franke, Hyde Park Bank, The Joyce Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Sara Lee Foundation, Shubert Foundation, and the University of Chicago. Court Theatre is also funded in part by grants from CityArts Program IV of the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs; and the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

(more/fact sheet)

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Synopsis: When a psychiatrist invents a series of increasingly outrageous lies to cover up his attempts to seduce his young secretary, all manner of pandemonium breaks out in the ward. A state inspector, a philandering wife, bellboys, policemen, and some missing bits from a statue of Sir Winston Churchill are caught up in the mix, creating a gleefully hilarious comedy of circumstance.

Title: **What the Butler Saw**
Playwright: **Joe Orton**
Directed by: **Sean Graney**
Featuring: **Mary Beth Fisher, Joe Foust, Mechelle Moe, Blake Montgomery, Eric Slater, and JB Waterman.**

Dates: **Previews:** November 8 – November 16, 2007
Press opening: November 17, 2007 at 8:00 p.m.
Regular run: November 18 – December 9, 2007

Schedule: **Wednesdays & Thursdays:** 7:30 p.m.
Fridays & Saturdays: 8:00 p.m. Saturday matinees beginning Nov. 24 at 3p.m.
Sundays: 2:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.
*There will be no performance on Thanksgiving Day, November 22, 2007.

Location: **Court Theatre, 5535 S. Ellis Avenue, Chicago**
Tickets: \$32 to \$38 for preview performances; \$38 to \$54 for regular run.
Box Office: The Box Office is located at **5535 S. Ellis Avenue, Chicago;**
773.753.4472; www.CourtTheatre.org

NOTES OF INTEREST:

- *What the Butler Saw* marks Sean Graney's directorial debut with Court Theatre. Graney is the Artistic Director of The Hypocrites Theatre, and his acclaimed play *The 4th Graders Present an Unnamed Love-Suicide* is traveling to 59E59 Theaters in November. He is also directing *The Elephant Man* at Steppenwolf
- Joe Orton's classic farce *What the Butler Saw* was first produced on March 5, 1969, in London. The first public performance, almost two years after Orton's brutal murder, was reportedly jeered with cries of "filth!"
- In a short but prolific career from 1964 until his death, Joe Orton shocked, outraged and amused audiences with his scandalous black comedies. "Ortonesque" has since become a recognized term for "outrageously macabre."
- Drawing on the theatrical tradition of comedic farce, characterized by instances of mistaken identity, improbable—and improbably complex—situations, linguistic acrobatics, and sexual deviancy, *What the Butler Saw* is simultaneously the a model of its form and a mocking send-up thereof.
- Orton's biography, *Prick Up Your Ears*, by John Lahr, was published in 1978. The 1987 film *Prick Up Your Ears* is based on Orton's diaries and on Lahr's research. Directed by Stephen Frears, it starred Gary Oldman, Alfred Molina, and Vanessa Redgrave. Alan Bennett wrote the screenplay.
- High School matinees are offered at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, November 29 & Wednesday, December 5, 2007. Interested educators may contact Milan Pejnovich at 773.834.3243 for further information.