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The Theatre School at DePaul University awards the 2023 Cunningham Commission for Youth Theatre to Jeremy Ohringer

CHICAGO (July 14, 2023) - **The Theatre School** is pleased to announce **Jeremy Ohringer as the recipient of the 2023 Cunningham Commission for Youth Theatre**. Jeremy will begin writing a play for families and young audiences that tells the story of a fifth grader Ben Isaac who discovers a note that sends him on an incredible adventure around the city of Chicago. From meeting the giant pacific octopus at the **Shedd Aquarium** to digging up pieces of Chicago's history in **Jackson Park**, Ben will take young audiences on a journey to some of Chicago's landmark locations.

The Theatre School Dean **Martine Kei Green-Rogers** comments, "The Theatre School strives to challenge, entertain, and stimulate the imagination of families and young audiences through the commission and production of new plays. We are excited to commission Jeremy for this new, innovative work that reflects our audience's experience in an urban, contemporary, and multi-racial environment."

Ohringer comments, "I have always wanted to write a play for young people. Before I attended graduate school, I worked as a teaching artist for folks from 4 to 16 years old. While my focus is now with college-age students, I find that I am still incorporating activities and perspectives I used with younger folks. When I consider why this might be, I immediately think of my own reason I go to the theatre: wonder."

Jeremy embraces wonder and theatricality in his writing, drawing inspiration from his experience seeing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Lincoln Park Zoo as a child.

"From seeing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Lincoln Park Zoo in 1996 to this moment, I am chasing the full-body experience of wonder that theatre is so adept at cultivating. It was theatre, in part, that gave me hope as a young queer kid. Through theatre, I could ask big questions while finding a sense of community, and in some cases, empowerment. I believe in the power of theatrical experiences to empower young people without being patronizing or didactic. I still remember how challenging I found *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in that park. I also remember how inspired I was and how included I felt."

Jeremy currently serves as an assistant professor at North Central College and as an adjunct professor at The Theatre School at DePaul University. He will develop his play over the next year with input from The Cunningham Commission Committee, composed of Theatre School faculty members **Coya Paz**, **Jeff Mills**, and **Michelle Lopez-Rios**.

The Cunningham Commission

The Cunningham Commission for Youth Theatre was established at The Theatre School to honor the memory of the Rev. Donald Cunningham, a Chicago priest, playwright, and lover of theatre. The purpose of the commission is to encourage the writing of dramatic works for young audiences that affirm the centrality of religion, broadly defined, and the human quest for meaning, truth, and community. Playwrights from the Chicagoland area and alumni of The Theatre School are eligible to apply.

“Each year, we receive incredible proposals. It is always an incredibly difficult decision. It has been joyous to produce two Cunningham Commissions in the last two seasons.” said **Lopez-Rios**, the artistic director of Chicago Playworks.

The 2022 Cunningham Commission was awarded to Theatre School alumna, **Lavina Jadhvani** (BFA Directing, 2015). Jadhvani’s play, *The Secret Garden*, is a textually faithful adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel that re-imagines the Craven and Lennox families as Indian and was a semi-finalist for the 2022 National Playwrights Conference at the O'Neill.

Chicago Playworks

The Theatre School intends to produce the plays created through this commission in its highly celebrated Chicago Playworks for Families and Young Audiences series. Founded as the Goodman Children’s Theatre in 1925 and recognized as a pioneer of theatre for families, Chicago Playworks welcomes more than 25,000 students and families to its productions each season. Once completed, Jeremy Ohringer’s new play will be considered for The Theatre School’s 2024-2025 season.

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The Theatre School was founded as the Goodman School of Drama in 1925 and trains students to the highest level of professional skill and artistry in an inclusive and diverse conservatory setting.