

For Immediate Release

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Stage Left Theatre presents the Chicago Premiere of
After Ashley
by Gina Gionfriddo

October 14 – November 15, 2008

- **Free Night of Theatre** program announced -

Chicago, September 8, 2008 – In its Chicago premiere by Stage Left Theatre (SLT), ***After Ashley*** is an astonishingly funny play, despite the fact that it revolves around a horrible tragedy. As the opening production in Stage Left's *Season 27: Rise Up*, Gina Gionfriddo's satirical comedy examines the commercialization of grief and victimhood through the story of Justin, a teenage boy struggling with his own losses and trying to escape the spotlight of the country's obsession with vicarious trauma. ***After Ashley*** premieres in Chicago after originating at the Humana Festival at the Actors Theatre of Louisville and its New York premiere at The Vineyard Theatre. The latter production was named one of 2005's ten-best theatre shows by Entertainment Weekly and was the recipient of two Obie Awards. ***After Ashley*** is being translated for productions in Germany and Poland. Opening Night for Stage Left's Chicago Premiere is Tuesday, October 14th at 7:30 PM.

THE PLAY

The national media's hunger for violence, sex and redemption grabbed hold of the tragedy that struck Justin's family when he was only 14 years old. Three years later, tele-cash-registers still ringing, he fights back with his only weapon: no-holds-barred wit. But when he also discovers the beginnings of love and the capacity for wisdom and understanding, will his battle against the media vultures and amateur celebrities also destroy his own new-found hope? Gina Gionfriddo's razor-sharp wit provides an incisive, satirical reflection on a round-the-clock media culture obsessed with 'reality,' celebrity and sensationalism.

After Ashley had its New York premiere at The Vineyard Theatre and was named one of 2005's ten-best theatre shows by Entertainment Weekly. The New York production starred Kieran Culkin and Academy Award-winning actress, Anna Paquin, and received two Obie Awards (for Special Playwriting and for Performance – Kieran Culkin). It was also nominated for the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Play, the Outer Critics Circle-John Gassne Award for Playwriting, and the Best Plays Theater Yearbook (2004-2005). The play originated at the Humana Festival and has received regional productions across the country. It is being translated for productions in Germany and Poland.

FREE NIGHT OF THEATRE PARTICIPATION

Stage Left is proud to announce that they are joining the League of Chicago Theatres in the Free Night of Theatre event. Anyone who has never before attended a Stage Left production is welcome to

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attend the **After Ashley** performance on Thursday, October 16 – **free of charge!** Started by Theatre Communications Group in 2005, the Free Night of Theatre program has expanded from three cities in its debut year to over 20 participating theatre communities in 2007.

TICKETS, DATES & INFORMATION

After Ashley runs Thursdays through Saturdays at 8:00 PM, Sundays at 3:00 PM from 10/16/08 through 11/15/08. Tickets are \$20 on Thursdays, \$22 on Fridays and Sundays, and \$25 on Saturdays. Opening Night is Tuesday, October 14th at 7:30 PM and tickets are \$25. Previews are 10/9, 10/10, 10/11 and 10/13 at 8:00 PM, and preview tickets are \$10. Running time is approximately two and a half hours with one intermission. Student Rush tickets are 50% off any remaining tickets ten minutes before show (if available), and senior and group discounts are also available. \$5 tickets for industry professionals are available on the first two Thursdays of the run, 10/16 & 10/23. Tickets may be purchased by calling the box office at 773.883.8830 or online at www.stagelefttheatre.com. Stage Left Theatre is located at 3408 N. Sheffield Ave. in Chicago. Street, metered and paid lot parking is available. The theatre is handicapped and CTA accessible via the Belmont El (Red & Brown) & Addison El (Red) stops.

Media comps, photos, videos and interviews are available by contacting Laura Blegen at 773.883.8830 ext. 2 (office), 312.371.6471 (cell) or laura@stagelefttheatre.com. Streaming video will be available at www.stagechannel.com. Hi-res photos, this release and archived releases and photos will be available at www.stagelefttheatre.com/press.html.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Stage Left continues its popular **Sunday Symposium** program. Every Sunday matinee is followed immediately by a discussion with the artists about the issues raised in the production. The program furthers Stage Left's mission of producing plays that raise debate and challenge perspectives on political and social issues. Sunday Symposia are free to the public and, when possible, feature the actors, director and playwright of the production, as well as other invited guests and experts, engaging in lively discussion with audience members.

THE PEOPLE

Gina Gionfriddo (playwright) is an award-winning playwright and accomplished television writer. Currently she is a writer/producer for the NBC drama, *Law and Order*, and prior to that worked as a writer for *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* and *Cold Case*. Her most recent play, *Becky Shaw*, premiered at Actors Theatre of Louisville's Humana Festival and will open Off-Broadway at Second Stage in the winter 2008-2009. In addition to the Obie Award for **After Ashley**, Gina has received a Guggenheim Fellowship in Playwriting, The Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, The Helen Merrill Award for Emerging Playwrights, and an American Theatre Critics Association/Steinberg Citation. Her other plays include *U.S. Drag* which was produced Off-Broadway in 2008 by the stageFARM and directed by Trip Cullman; *Squalor*, a one-act play commissioned and presented by the stageFARM as part of Vengeance; and *Guinevere* which was presented in the O'Neill Playwrights Conference. She is presently at work on a new play commissioned by Playwrights' Horizons. **After Ashley** has been published by Dramatists Play Service.

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Greg Werstler (Director) has worked as a theater administrator and director in Chicago for over twelve years and is currently the Managing Director of the ComedySportz Theatre. Directing credits include *Rumors* and *Loveliest Afternoon* for Eclipse Theatre Company, *Voice of the Prairie* and *The Eight: Reindeer Monologues* for Dolphinback Theater Company (of which he was a founding member), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Equity Library Theatre, and *Angles in America* at Lake Forest College. He has also directed several projects in Rhinoceros Festivals throughout the years and staged readings for American Theater Company, Chicago Dramatists, and Victory Gardens. Productions currently running include *Hope and Ella*, co-productions with his beautiful wife Ilyssa.

The **cast** includes SLT ensemble members Brian Plocharczyk (Justin) and Cory Krebsbach (Roderick), as well as Kate Black (Julie), Nika Ericson (Ashley), Ian Maxwell (Alden), and Rob Skrocki (David).

The **staff** includes SLT ensemble members Christine Gatto (assistant direction) and John Kohn III (lighting design), with guest artists Tina Howard (costume design), Chris LaPorte (sound design), Lori Mages (properties design), Ashley Nelson (production stage management) and Kurt Sharp (set design).

ABOUT STAGE LEFT

Founded in 1982, Stage Left Theatre is committed to nurturing voices for the American theatre by developing and producing plays that raise debate and challenge perspectives on political and social issues. Through a full subscription season and Downstage Left, one of Chicago's most prolific new play development programs, Stage Left strives to bring high-quality new work and world premieres to the Chicago stage. Over the last seven years, the Joseph Jefferson Committee has honored Stage Left world premieres with six nominations and three awards for Best New Work.

UPCOMING SHOWS

- ◆ **The Day of Knowledge** – World Premiere
From award-winning ensemble members, playwright David Alan Moore and director Drew Martin, *The Day of Knowledge* is a magical and powerful story of a community's return to hope and renewal. Forty days after an almost-unimaginable trauma, the lives of four families collide in a single night. A fiery angel haunts the town, unseen to all but one. And a mute child holds either the hope for reconciliation or the spark of renewed bloodshed. An exciting new voice in Chicago theatre, Mr. Moore received a Jeff Award for Outstanding New Work for Stage Left's 2006 production of *In Times of War*.
Runs: February 14 – March 28, 2009
Press opening: Tuesday, February 24 at 7:30 PM

- ◆ **LeapFest 6** – See what's next in Chicago theatre
LeapFest's first five years have so far graduated ten plays to world premiere productions in Chicago and beyond, with three of these receiving the Jeff Award for Best New Work. Join us for the sixth smash year and see what's next in Chicago Theatre. Five new politically minded plays will "take the leap" towards production in the three week event. Each play will be presented in rotating repertory, and performances are followed by a discussion with the playwright and director. Each play will be presented in rotating repertory, and performances are followed by a discussion with the playwright and director.
Runs: May 12 – May 30, 2009
First Night: Tuesday, May 12 at 7:30 PM

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