

**N E W S R E L E A S E**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
August 11, 2006  
<http://theatreschool.depaul.edu>

**THE THEATRE SCHOOL ESTABLISHES NEW ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS**  
**GENEROUS DONATIONS TOTAL MORE THAN \$178,000**

The Theatre School at DePaul University will establish new endowed scholarships with more than \$178,000 in recent donations. The ***Graduate Showcase Endowment Fund*** has been created with leadership gifts from Los Angeles-based actor **P.J. Byrne** (MFA Acting 1999), Los Angeles-based actress **Paula Cale** (BFA Acting 1993), Associate Artistic Director of New York's Roundabout Theatre Company and four-time Tony Award nominee **Scott Ellis** (BFA Acting 1978), and New York-based actress, director and educator **Maureen Huntley-Sheahen** (BFA Acting 1982). These gifts will help offset the costs for graduating students to showcase their performance and technical work to agents, casting directors and other professionals at venues in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York City. The Graduate Showcases are held at the end of each school year in May and June.

The Playwriting Program at the Theatre School has also received exceptional support with two new endowed student scholarships. Theatre School Dean Emeritus **Dr. John Ransford Watts** and his wife **Joyce Lannom Watts** have donated \$28,000 to bring the ***John R. and Joyce L. Watts Scholarship for a Playwriting Student*** up to full endowment. **Zach Helm** (BFA Acting 1996), now a Hollywood screenwriter and director, earned his degree at the Theatre School in acting, but had a parallel development in playwriting which became his career path. Realizing that playwrights often have a less visible role than actors, Helm is giving \$50,000 to set up the ***Zach Helm Endowed Scholarship for a Playwriting Student*** to support and develop future dramatic voices. When Helm was approached to help fund an international student in the playwriting program, his thoughtful response was to make sure there would be scholarship aid for a playwriting student each year. His gift includes an additional expendable component.

In a surprise announcement at The Theatre School's 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Awards for Excellence in the Arts on May 4, 2006, event host **Scott Ellis** pledged a \$50,000 donation to The Theatre School to establish the ***Joseph Slowik Endowed Scholarship Fund***, in honor of Theatre School professor emeritus Joseph Slowik. Ellis said Slowik, a beloved figure who has taught at The Theatre School since 1953 and who has directed more than 100 productions during his career, has been a key role model for him and that he looked forward to providing future recipients of the Slowik scholarship with a letter describing the teacher's impact upon generations of students.

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In addition the final leadership gift for the Graduate Showcase Endowment came from a bequest in the will of **Samuel J. Silverstein**. Mr. Silverstein's career was in the photography business, but his philanthropy benefited a wide range of cultural and Jewish institutions in the city. During the Depression, Silverstein remembered frequently attending performances in the Blackstone Theatre (now DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre), which was one of Chicago's three WPA theatres. He was moved to make this donation after seeing a curtain speech by a student representing The Theatre School ST\*RS ("Support Tomorrow's Rising Stars"), a student organization founded in 1998 to support Theatre School graduating students' Graduate Showcase trips to New York and L.A.

The Theatre School at DePaul University educates, trains and inspires students of theatre in a conservatory setting that is rigorous, disciplined, culturally diverse and that strives for the highest level of professional skill and artistry. A commitment to diversity and equality in education is central to its mission. As an integral part of the training, The Theatre School produces public programs and performances from a wide repertoire of classic, contemporary and original plays that challenge, entertain and stimulate the imagination. The school seeks to enhance the intellectual and cultural life of the university community, the city and the profession. More information about The Theatre School is available at <http://theatreschool.depaul.edu>

### DONOR BIOS/DONATION INFORMATION

Before focusing on acting full time, **P.J. Byrne** was vice president of development at George St. Pictures. Since then, he has appeared in over 40 national television commercials. His voice can frequently be heard on everything from trailers to radio spots. He has played a multitude of guest star and recurring roles on television ranging from THE WEST WING, and NCIS on the dramatic side, to comedic roles in THE NEW ADVENTURES OF OLD CHRISTINE and RENO 911. In film, Byrne has worked with actors such as Clint Eastwood, Diane Keaton, Nicole Kidman, Jim Carey and Will Ferrell, to name a few. He is currently shooting EVAN ALMIGHTY with Steve Carell and the independent film KISSING COUSINS. Byrne said, *"While at The Theatre School's MFA program, I stood on a lot of shoulders and received a lot of scholarships. I love what I do, I love this work, and I jumped on the opportunity to give back what I had been given. I know how difficult the business is, so I know how important it is to give someone else a chance to learn the craft and prepare for the world. Both of my parents have always been generous with their alma maters, so I didn't think twice about supporting mine. Everyone should extend a helping hand to support the next generation's interests, especially to those who have fewer resources – and don't necessarily wait until you can afford it . . . it should just be a part of your life!"*

A native of Northern Virginia, **Paula Cale** once interned at the White House. She is perhaps best known as Joanie Hansen from the television series PROVIDENCE, and as Gen-X-er McGovern on MURPHY BROWN. On Broadway, she played Gilda Radner in BUNNY, BUNNY and was in NIGHT OF THE IGUANA. Cale said, *"I was fortunate enough to have my parents pay for not only my education, but also for my Graduate Showcase expenses. Any and all of my success in acting is directly related to the agent who contacted me after she saw my monologue at the New York showcase (and who still represents me 13 years later). I had the great fortune to prove my worth as an actress, to take all the extraordinary experiences and teachings I garnered while at The Theatre School and touch others through theatre, TV and film only because of my audition at the Showcase. I have never taken this for granted."*

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*"The only way to get a job (and hopefully make a difference in this profession) is with a great agent. The only way I got an agent was because of the Showcase. There is a great opportunity and responsibility to infuse American theatre with brilliant acting. I believe that The Theatre School, its faculty, and the select students have the opportunity and responsibility to help realize such needs. My first day as a student we were crammed in the movement room and faculty member Betsy Hamilton told us that we were going to be asked to stretch ourselves in ways we didn't realize possible. The next day, we visited at the Merle Reskin Theatre faculty member Jim Ostelhoff told us that the theatre was a church, a place for sacred works. I was stretched as an actress as well as a person and graduated from the school with an incredible respect for the theatre. The only way I was able to have an opportunity to share these teachings was because of the opportunities afforded me by the The Theatre School Showcase."*

Recently, **Scott Ellis** has directed ENTERTAINING MR. SLOANE, Douglas Carter Beane's THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED and TWELVE ANGRY MEN (Tony and Drama Desk nominations, Outer Critics Circle Award, Best Revival). On Broadway, he worked on THE BOYS FROM SYRACUSE, THE MAN WHO HAD ALL THE LUCK with Chris O'Donnell, THE RAINMAKER with Woody Harrelson and Jayne Atkinson, 1776 (Drama Desk, Tony nomination for Best Director), SHE LOVES ME (Tony nomination, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards), PICNIC (Outer Critics nomination), COMPANY, A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY, STEEL PIER (Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards, Tony nomination). His London work includes SHE LOVES ME (Olivier Award). Off-Broadway, he has directed THE WAVERLY GALLERY, THE DOG PROBLEM, THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON, DARK RAPTURE, AND THE WORLD GOES 'ROUND: THE SONGS OF KANDER AND EBB (Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards) and FLORA, THE RED MENACE (Drama Desk nomination). For the NYC Opera, he worked on 110 IN THE SHADE, A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC with Jeremy Irons and Juliet Stevenson, also with Victor Garber, Judith Ivey and Zoe Caldwell (L.A. Opera). Ellis was director/co-conceiver for SONDHEIM: A CELEBRATION AT CARNEGIE HALL and Great Performances' MY FAVORITE BROADWAY: THE LEADING LADIES. Ellis said, *"I have realized over the years that I owe so much to The Theatre School and the teachers I had, including Joe Slowik, so I thought a scholarship in his name was a perfect way to appreciate him and the school. I hope this scholarship will help other students on their journey, one I embarked upon myself many years ago. A school is as good as its teachers, and educators are so important . . . if future students find faculty like Joe Slowik, they'll be just fine."*

MR. MAGORIUM'S WONDER EMPORIUM marks the feature film directorial debut of screenwriter **Zach Helm**. The film, currently in production in Toronto, features Natalie Portman, Dustin Hoffman and Jason Bateman. Helm wrote the film STRANGER THAN FICTION, directed by Marc Forster (FINDING NEVERLAND, MONSTER'S BALL), which stars Will Ferrell and is scheduled for release in November 2006. Following that screenplay, Helm's stage play, LAST CHANCE FOR A SLOW DANCE, had its world premiere at New York Stage and Film. The following season, Helm worked on his latest play, GOOD CANARY, which received a grant from the Ovid Foundation Playwriting Fellowship (in conjunction with the Ojai Playwrights Festival). Productions of GOOD CANARY are currently in development at New York's Roundabout Theatre (to be directed by Michael Mayer), and in Paris (to be directed by John Malkovich). Helm is currently developing his television series pilot THOMAS JOHNSON, a family thriller about a quiet patriarch who may or may not be a serial killer (with Imagine Television and Twentieth Century Fox Television).

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Helm said, “ *I chose to develop this scholarship fund simply to support my greatest joy - the experience of reading a new piece of dramatic literature. It is unfortunate that playwrights are often unsupported, unrecognized and under-appreciated and I want to help (in my small way) by giving necessary aide to what I hope are members of a new generation of dramatic voices. Theatre, film and television are as much written arts as performance arts, and if we believe that all great drama begins with the page, then we must recognize that the page is only an extension of the mind, soul, and creativity of the writer and the resources they find available. I can't say what great work may come from the writers who receive this award . . . I only know I'd hate to be the poor sap who didn't loan Shakespeare a pen when he had the chance. I do not look at this endowment as charity or generosity. At my most optimistic, I view it as an opportunity to give some small reparation for the love and support I was given by The Theatre School and to contribute to its brilliant, fervent minds. At my most cynical, I view it as a necessary step in ensuring I am not watching bad theatre in the future.*”

**Maureen Huntley-Sheahen** is a freelance director and member of AEA, SAG and AFTRA. After graduating from The Theatre School in 1982, she went on to work in Chicago-area theatres, and also did commercial and industrial work. She married Paul Sheahen in 1985, and moved to New Jersey to continue working in the business. She co-founded Creative Kids Theatrical Workshops in 1997 (sold in 2003), and has been performing arts chair for Barnstable Academy in Oakland, NJ, for the past 15 years. Huntley-Sheahen said, “*Supporting this endowment is very important to me and my husband Paul Sheahen (of Ernst & Young, which also provided matching funds for this donation). Giving young theatre students the financial opportunity to follow their dreams and hone their art is a great honor. This endowment is long overdue, as I wish it had been available when I was at school. Paul and I embrace this initiative, since The Theatre School has given me so many opportunities, and the confidence to succeed in life and theatre.*”

Theatre School Dean Emeritus **John Ransford Watts** received his M.F.A. from Yale University, and Ph.D. from Union Graduate School with post-graduate studies at Harvard, U.C.L.A. and Oxford. He came to the school in 1979, several months after it arrived at DePaul from the Art Institute of Chicago. He was recruited to lead and guide the school from its life as a three-year conservatory program at the Goodman Theatre (founded in 1925) to become a four-year conservatory in the collegiate setting of a major urban university. Starting under his leadership, the school has grown into one of America's premiere theatre training institutions. Before coming to the school Dr. Watts had been the dean of the School of Fine Arts at California State University, Long Beach, and prior to that associate dean and professor at the School for the Arts at Boston University. He had also been the producing director of The Theatre Company of Boston, the Poets' Theatre in Cambridge, associate director and general manager of the Boston Arts Festival and of the Cambridge Drama Festival. In the public sector he was the founding Chairman of the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, and director and vice-president of the Public Corporation for the Arts for the City of Long Beach, California. Dean Watts retired from the Theatre School in 1999, completing 20 years of service to the school. In 2000 DePaul University granted him the Via Sapientiae Award, the institution's highest recognition for excellent service and accomplishment, and the Joseph Jefferson Committee presented him with their Lifetime Achievement Award.

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