

MEDIA RELEASE

Soulpepper brings theatrical life to Dennis Lee's poetry in world premiere of Civil Elegies

Toronto, ON – November 11, 2009 – **Albert Schultz**, Founding Artistic Director of Soulpepper Theatre Company, today announced that the company's production of *Civil Elegies* will run December 3 – 24, 2009, at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts. Co-created by **Mike Ross** and **Lorenzo Savoini** (with Albert Schultz), *Civil Elegies* features the words of **Dennis Lee** with music by Mike Ross.

Dennis Lee, Toronto's first poet laureate and one of Canada's best loved writers, is renowned for his work for both children and adults. In 1967, Canada's Centennial year, Dennis Lee began writing *Civil Elegies*, a profound meditation on what it means to be a Canadian citizen and, specifically, a resident of his home city – Toronto. That same year, Lee founded House of Anansi Press with a commitment to publish young Canadian poets. *Civil Elegies* won the Governor General's Award in 1972.

In the late 1990's, in Charlottetown, P.E.I., a young actor/musician named Mike Ross was given a book of poems by Dennis Lee as an opening night gift. This began a decade-long musical voyage. Ross, unbeknownst to Lee, composed stunning music to many of Lee's rhyming poems spanning several collections of Lee's work.

Mike Ross and Lorenzo Savoini – both graduates of the Soulpepper Academy – are two of Canada's most talented theatre artists. Ross is a composer, musician, musical director and actor who has composed music for Soulpepper's *Travesties*, *Under Milk Wood*, and *As You Like It*, and was musical director for *Time of Your Life*. As an actor he has performed in *Fire* (Theatre Calgary), *No Great Mischief*, *Moliere* (Tarragon) and *Rock n' Roll* (Grand Theatre). Lorenzo Savoini was recently named Toronto's "Best Rising Designer" by *NOW Magazine*. Designs for Soulpepper include set design for *Of the Fields*, *Lately*, *Antigone*, *The Odd Couple* and *The Caretaker*, and lighting design for *Billy Bishop Goes to War*. Savoini has also worked extensively at Stratford.

Albert Schultz describes the creative process: "In 2007, when Mike was given an opportunity to perform his 'Lee Songs' for the poet himself, who was delighted by them. Shortly thereafter, Mike and Lorenzo began a theatrical exploration of Lee's *Civil Elegies* with Mike's 'Lee Songs' providing thematic and musical counterpoint. Mike and Lorenzo asked me to work with them on bringing this project to theatrical life, and the process has been one of discovery and delight."

Directed by Albert Schultz, performed by Mike Ross, and designed by Lorenzo Savoini, *Civil Elegies* previews December 3, 2009, opens December 8, and runs until December 24 at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, located at 55 Mill Street, Building 49, in the Distillery Historic District. Tickets range from \$28 – \$68 and are available by calling the Young Centre box office at 416.866.8666 or by visiting www.soulpepper.ca. \$20 tickets are available for 21-30 year-olds at www.stageplay.ca. Stageplay is sponsored by TD Bank Financial Group.

This production is generously supported by Robin and David Young. 2009 Soulpepper Lead Sponsors are: Sun Life Financial, Scotiabank Group and TELUS. Soulpepper gratefully acknowledges annual operating support from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Toronto Arts Council.

Soulpepper Theatre Company is an artist-founded, classical repertory theatre company with a three-tiered mandate: to present the world's greatest stories in vital Canadian interpretations; to train a new generation of theatre artists; and to inspire and enrich youth through mentorship and access programs.

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