

MEDIA RELEASE

Arthur Miller's Timeless Classic

Death of a Salesman on stage October 16

Joseph Ziegler and Nancy Palk play Willy & Linda Loman

Toronto, ON – September 20, 2010 – **Albert Schultz**, Founding Artistic Director of Soulpepper Theatre Company, today announced that the company's production of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* will run October 16 - November 13, 2010, at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts.

Death of a Salesman is one of the undisputed masterpieces of Western theatre and a cornerstone of contemporary drama. It was also the first play to win all three major prizes: the Pulitzer Prize, Tony Award and New York Critics Drama Circle Award. Miller, in this moving and masterful piece, explores the heartbreaking deceptions and empty promises of the American dream through the eyes of Willy and Linda Loman and their sons Biff and Happy.

Soulpepper's Founding Artistic Director **Albert Schultz** directs real-life couple and Soulpepper Founding Members **Joseph Ziegler** and **Nancy Palk** in the roles of Willy and Linda Loman. The stellar cast also includes **Ari Cohen** as Biff, **Tim Campbell** as Happy, Founding Members **Mike Hanrahan** as Charley and **William Webster** as Uncle Ben as well as Soulpepper Academy Artists: **Ins Choi**, **Tatjana Cornij**, **Raquel Duffy**, **Gregory Prest**, **Karen Rae**, and **Brendan Wall**.

Death of a Salesman previews October 16, 2010, opens October 21, and runs until November 13, 2010 at the Young Centre for the Performing Arts, located at 55 Mill Street, Building 49, in the Distillery Historic District. Tickets range from \$31.20 - \$75.33 (including 13% HST) and are available by calling the Young Centre box office at 416.866.8666 or by visiting soulpepper.ca. \$22 tickets are available for 21-30 year-olds at stageplay.ca. StagePlay is sponsored by TD Bank Financial Group.

The Production Sponsor of *Death of a Salesman* is National Bank Financial Group. 2010 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.

BACKGROUND NOTES

"A small man can be as exhausted as a great man."

This past summer I ran into Joseph Ziegler and his wife Nancy Palk on their way into the Young Centre, engrossed in conversation. When I asked what they were debating, Nancy said, "Death of Salesman. It's all we talk about these days." Not yet in rehearsal, they were already immersed in the play's rich and allusive world, preparing to inhabit Arthur Miller's most memorable characters: Willy and Linda Loman. Joking, I asked if Joe could sum up his role. "Bottomless," he replied with an avid grin.

This inexhaustible, timeless play was written – so the biographies say – in six blazing weeks. It had its origins in a short story Miller wrote at seventeen. A note on the manuscript in the playwright's handwriting reveals that the salesman on whom the main character is based threw himself under a subway train. This provided the initial spark but by the time he sat down to write the play, Miller was calling on a great deal more than a single incident. His own memories poured into the play, as well as his passionate feelings about the promises and deceptions of American life. The Loman household is, by Miller's own admission, animated by the same spirit he recalled at the home of his Uncle Manny Newman, also a salesman. Miller did not spend a great deal of time with his uncle, but Manny's personality, his bullying drive, possessed his imagination. Newman, he says, was "a competitor at all times, in all things and at every moment. My brother and I saw him running neck and neck with his two sons in some race that never stopped in his mind."

When Miller's first great success, *All My Sons*, was playing on Broadway, his Uncle Manny came to see it. After the show, Manny said nothing about the play. Instead he answered a question Miller hadn't asked. "Buddy's doing very well," he said, referring to his cherished son, presumably so Miller wouldn't think he'd pulled ahead in the competition to be the greatest. Willy Loman, like Manny Newman, is not a great man but he is obsessed with greatness, with leaving a shining legacy for his two sons. Greatness, Willy believes, is being liked and admired. It's not about how hard you work or the content of your character, but what other people think of you. "Be liked," Willy says, "and you will never want." Biff and Happy, the sons he raised under this banner, are in their different ways lost. When Biff, desperate to cut through the web of lies and reach his father cries out, "Pop, I'm a dime a dozen and so are you!" Willy will not, cannot hear it.

This summer Joseph Ziegler spoke about the salesman's need to stay optimistic and how Miller charts the warping of that enthusiasm. Charley says in the play, "A salesman's got to dream." The gap between the greatness of Willy's dreams and the bleakness of his everyday life drives him farther and farther into delusion, eventually pushing him to gamble everything on one great (in his mind) gesture. In a home trembling "with resolutions and shouts of victories that had not yet taken place but surely would tomorrow," it is Willy's wife Linda who "bears the cross of reality..." It is she who pays attention, she who shines her love on her husband, appreciating him, cherishing him, defending him even against his own sons.

BACKGROUND NOTES CONTINUED ...

Arthur Miller's landmark play has enthralled audiences from New York to Beijing. Now we are all invited into the conversation that real-life husband and wife Nancy Palk and Joseph Ziegler continue to have through the characters of this great and heartbreaking work of art. been.

Tidbits

- The original production of this play had an all-star cast: Lee J. Cobb (forever associated with this role) as Willy, Mildred Dunnock as Linda, Arthur Kennedy (later a film actor) as Biff and Cameron Mitchell (later a television star) as Hap.
- Death of a Salesman was revived on Broadway in 1999 to celebrate its 50th anniversary and it proved as painful and penetrating as ever, winning the Tony for Best Revival. Brian Dennehy played Willy and he won a Tony as Best Actor.
- Dustin Hoffman played Willy both on stage and in a TV movie in the 80's. Arthur Miller's younger daughter Rebecca is a respected film-maker. She is married to the actor Daniel Day-Lewis.

Notes by

Soulpepper Associate Artist Paula Wing

PLAYWRIGHT BIO

1915 – In Harlem New York on October 17 Arthur Asher Miller, the second of three children, is born to Isidore, a Polish immigrant, and Augusta, an American with Polish roots.

1916-1928 – Isidore is illiterate but owns a successful women's clothing business. The Millers have a chauffeur and a summer house in Far Rockaway.

1929 – Isidore loses everything in the Wall Street Crash and the family moves to a modest house in Brooklyn, which some believe later serves as the model for the Loman home in *Death of a Salesman*.

1932 – The sports-loving, avid reader graduates from high school and works in an automobile parts warehouse to earn money. After reading Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, he decides to become a writer.

1938 – Miller graduates in English from the University of Michigan, returns to New York and joins the Federal Theater Project – closed down a year later due to suspected Communist infiltration. He writes radio plays and supplements his income by working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

1940 – He marries his college sweetheart, Mary Slattery, a girl from a good Catholic family and they go on to have two children: Jane and Robert. This same year *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, his first professionally produced play, is a bona fide disaster, closing after only four performances.

1946 – *All My Sons* is his first big success on Broadway, earning Miller his first Tony Award.

1948 – He builds a studio in Roxbury, Connecticut where he writes Act 1 of *Death of a Salesman* in less than a day. He completes the play six weeks later.

1949 – On February 10 at the Morosco Theatre *Death of a Salesman* has its first opening night. It is directed by the legendary Elia Kazan and wins the Tony Award, New York Critics Drama Circle Award and Pulitzer Prize, the first time one play takes all three prizes. Miller is named "Outstanding Father of the Year."

1951 – The celebrated writer has a brief affair with celebrity actress Marilyn Monroe but returns to his family.

1952 – Elia Kazan appears before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and, afraid of being blacklisted, he "names names" (revealing Communist party membership of friends and colleagues, causing them to be blacklisted). Miller cannot accept Kazan's choice and their close friendship is severed. They do not speak for more than ten years. Miller travels to Salem, Massachusetts to re-search the infamous Witch Trials of 1692.

PLAYWRIGHT BIO CONTINUED...

1953 – The play that results is *The Crucible*, which opens at the Beck Theatre on January 22. Initially only a moderate success, it becomes one of Miller's most produced works. However it also arouses the suspicion of HUAC, who investigate Miller and deny him a passport to attend the London opening of *Crucible* the next year.

1956 – Miller leaves Mary Slattery and on June 29 he marries Marilyn Monroe. Their relationship will be a tabloid staple for the next five years. He appears before HUAC, after having secured a promise that they will not ask him to name names. The Committee asks him to name names anyway, he refuses and is found guilty of Contempt of Congress, fined, sent to prison, denied a passport and blacklisted.

1957 – His play *A View From the Bridge* (revised from an earlier one-act play) opens in London under the direction of Peter Brook. The despondent Miller essentially stops writing for the theatre for the next seven years.

1958 – Miller's criminal conviction is overturned. He begins work on the film *The Misfits*, starring his wife, whose drug use is spiralling out of control. He later calls this one of the bleakest periods of his life.

1961 – Miller and Monroe divorce. Less than two years later she dies of an overdose.

1962 – On February 17 he marries Austrian photographer Ingeborg Morath, with whom he will have two more children: Rebecca and Daniel, who will be born with Down's Syndrome and institutionalized very early in his life.

1964 – Miller and Kazan reunite (though they will never again be as close) to collaborate on *After the Fall*, a play many believe is autobiographical (there is a character similar in some ways to Monroe). Miller insists it's fiction.

1965 – He is named the first American president of PEN, a post he will hold for four years.

1968 – Miller's new family drama, *The Price*, premieres and becomes his most successful play since *Salesman*.

1969 – 1980 – He champions Russian dissident writers and his works are banned in the Soviet Union. He continues writing but his theatrical experiments, including a musical, do not meet with popular or critical success.

PLAYWRIGHT BIO CONTINUED...

1983 – He travels to the People's Republic of China to produce and direct *Death of a Salesman*. It is a huge success, spawning a memoir of his experiences there called *Salesman in Beijing*.

1987 – His autobiography *Timebends* is published. For the first time Miller discusses his relationship with Monroe.

1991 – His new play *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* premieres in London. When it is staged seven years later on Broadway, (starring Patrick Stewart of *Star Trek* fame) it gets great reviews but has a disappointingly brief run.

2002 – Miller receives Spain's Asturias Prize as "the undisputed master of drama." Inge Morath dies later this year of lymphatic cancer. Miller takes up with the much younger minimalist painter Agnes Barley, to the particular chagrin of his daughter Rebecca.

2003 – Miller is awarded the Jerusalem Prize.

2005 – On February 10 (the 56 anniversary of *Salesman's* premiere) Arthur Miller, suffering from a combination of cancer, pneumonia and congestive heart failure, dies at home surrounded by his family. Within hours, Rebecca Miller asks Barley to vacate the premises.

*Playwright Bio by
Soulpepper Associate Artist Paula Wing*