

ALLEY THEATRE

FOR RELEASE
July 19, 2016

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Tony-nominated Dark Comedy **Hand to God** Opens Alley Theatre's 70th Season

The Broadway hit by Texas playwright Robert Askins features Alley Company Members and a very rude sock puppet

HOUSTON – Alley Theatre Artistic Director Gregory Boyd announces the cast and creative team for Robert Askins' Tony-nominated play **Hand to God**, which opens the 2016-2017 Season on August 19 in the Neuhaus Theatre. A smashing success on Broadway and now in London, this fast-paced dark comedy is the Texas playwright's Alley debut. **Hand to God** is directed by Mark Shanahan and features Alley Company members. Tickets are on sale now at www.alleytheatre.org.

"**Hand to God** is a serious comedy that marries outrageousness with real depth of feeling and a *did-he-really-just-say-that* hilarity. It's exhilarating and alarming – angry and unsettling – and painful and ultimately moving. We are all thrilled to be making a production of Texas playwright Robert Askins' play and of celebrating his Alley debut and of welcoming this Cypress native back 'home'," said Boyd.

In **Hand to God**, the devil is lurking in a church basement puppet show in Cypress, Texas. And his name is...Tyrone. He may look like an innocent sock puppet, but when he infiltrates the angst-ridden church youth group and takes possession of Jason's arm, all Hell breaks loose. Spectacularly foul-mouthed and wickedly scandalous, Tyrone shocks the congregation with his outrageous insinuations, exposing their deepest secrets—and teaching us all about what it means to be human.

The New York Times called the play "Darkly delightful" and *The New Yorker* described it as "Sesame Street meets The Exorcist."

The **Hand to God** cast features Steve Pacek (Arden Theatre: *The Secret Garden, Metamorphoses*) as Jason, Michael Brusasco (*Spider's Web, All the Way*) as Pastor Greg, and Alley Company members Elizabeth Bunch (*Grounded, Born Yesterday*) as Jason's mom Margery; Emily Trask (*One Man, Two Guvnors, Around the World in 80 Days*) as youth group member Jessica; and Jay Sullivan (*Born Yesterday, Around the World in 80 Days*) as youth group member Timothy.

Hand to God is directed by Mark Shanahan, who recently directed the Alley's production of *Around the World in 80 Days*, and co-directed *Sherlock Holmes and The Adventure of the Suicide Club*. Shanahan has also performed in Alley productions of *The Hollow, Harvey, Treasure Island, Tryst, Hitchcock Blonde, Witness for the Prosecution*, and *Journey's End*.

Robert Askins was born in Cypress, Texas. His Tony-nominated, Obie Award-winning play **Hand to God** recently ran on London's West End (Olivier nominated for Best New Comedy) after it opened on Broadway in April 2015, following two critically-acclaimed runs at Ensemble Studio Theatre and MCC Theater, where it was named a NY Times Critics' Pick and called "the most entertaining show of 2014." Askins is an I-73 and Youngblood alum and a graduate of Baylor University. He's currently at work on two feature film projects and an original comedy series for HBO.

The play features scenic design by Kevin Rigdon (*The Nether, As You Like It*), with costume design by David C. Woolard (*Toxic Avenger; Broadway: Dames at Sea*), lighting design by Paul Whitaker (*Grounded, Other Desert Cities*), and sound

design by David Budries (Broadway: *Souvenir*).

Hand to God begins preview performances at the Alley Theatre on August 19, opens August 24, and continues through September 18, 2016 in the Neuhaus Theatre. *Hand to God* contains explicit language, profanity, sexual situations, and very rude puppets. Mature audiences only.

TICKETS

Tickets to **Hand to God** are on sale now and start at \$26. Discounted tickets are available for any student, regardless of age, with a valid student ID for \$16 for designated performances in designated sections. Tickets can be ordered online (alleytheatre.org) or by phone (713.220.5700). Discounts are available for groups of 10 or more.

TALKBACKS

The Alley Theatre will present Artist TalkBacks following the August 27 (2:30 p.m.) and August 30 (7:30 p.m.) performances of **Hand to God**. These discussions will feature cast and artistic staff.

The Alley Theatre will also present a special Alley In Context, featuring playwright Robert Askins following the August 25 (7:30pm) performance of **Hand to God**. An additional discussion is scheduled following the September 17 (2:30pm) performance of **Hand to God**. These discussions will feature civic leaders, local academics, and community members discussing the themes of the play and how they are reflected in our lives today. Artist Talk-Backs and Alley In Context are free and open to the public.

New this season, Designer Talks, will take place an hour before select Sunday matinee preview performances. On August 21 (1:30 p.m.) a member of the artistic staff will lead a discussion with **Hand to God's** creative team, giving audiences a behind-the-scenes look at the design process. The pre-show talks will offer audiences an exclusive opportunity to ask questions about the designer's work and learn how they brought the script to life.

2016-2017 SEASON

Season tickets can be ordered online (alleytheatre.org) or by phone (713.220.5700). Subscribers can purchase a 5-play package containing **A Midsummer Night's Dream, Dry Powder, Let the Right One In, A View from the Bridge, and Freaky Friday**; prices range from \$125-\$440. An 8-play package is also available containing all the plays in the 5-play package plus **Hand to God, Syncing Ink, and An Act of God**, with prices from \$198-\$629. Subscribers may purchase priority tickets for **A Christmas Carol** and **Santaland Diaries** before going on sale to the general public. Groups of 10 or more may reserve discounted tickets now by calling 713.315.3346.

ABOUT THE ALLEY THEATRE

The Alley Theatre, one of America's leading not-for-profit theatres, is a nationally recognized performing arts company lead by Artistic Director Gregory Boyd and Managing Director Dean R. Gladden. The Alley produces up to 16 plays each year in its newly renovated theatre, ranging from the best current work, to re-invigorated classic plays, to new plays by contemporary writers. The Alley is home to a Resident Company of actors. In addition, the Alley engages theatre artists of every discipline – actors, designers, composers, playwrights – who work on individual productions throughout each season as Visiting Artists.

The renovation of the Hubbard Theatre at the Alley was completed in October 2015 – and created a new 774-seat state-of-the-art performance venue. Matched with the 310-seat Neuhaus Theatre, the Alley offers nearly 500 performances each season. The Company reaches over 200,000 people each year through its performance and education programs. Its audience enrichment programs include pre-show and post-performance talks, events, and workshops for audience members of all ages.

The Alley Theatre is supported by the 2016-2017 season sponsor United Airlines, the official airline of the Alley Theatre.

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