Alley Theatre Announces 2017-2018 Season

The new season includes world premieres CLEO by Lawrence Wright, DESCRIBE THE NIGHT by Rajiv Joseph, LOVER, BELOVED: An Evening With Carson McCullers, a new play with music by Suzanne Vega and Duncan Sheik; a tour de force reincarnation of jazz legend Louis Armstrong in SATCHMO AT THE WALDORF; the return of LBJ in THE GREAT SOCIETY; Steve Martin’s hilarious PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE; a timely new comedy THE CAKE; and the return of Sherlock in HOLMES AND WATSON.

HOUSTON - Gregory Boyd, Artistic Director of the Tony Award-winning Alley Theatre announces eight productions for its 2017-2018 season including the premiere of three plays developed in the Alley All New Festival:

WORLD PREMIERE
DESCRIBE THE NIGHT
By Rajiv Joseph

An epic new play tracing the stories of seven men and women connected by history, myth and conspiracy theories.

In 1920, the Russian writer Isaac Babel wanders the countryside with the Red Cavalry. Seventy years later, a mysterious KGB agent spies on a woman in Dresden and falls in love. In 2010, an aircraft carrying most of the Polish government crashes in the Russian city of Smolensk. Rajiv Joseph (Gruesome Playground Injuries, The Monster at the Door, Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo) returns to the Alley with his epic new play Describe the Night which traces the stories of seven men and women connected by history, myth and conspiracy theories.

Describe the Night was commissioned by the Alley and was featured as a reading in the 2017 Alley All New Festival. The Alley previously produced the world premieres of Joseph’s The Monster at the Door and Gruesome Playground Injuries. His play Archduke will premiere in April of this year at Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles. Joseph was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for his play Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo and also awarded a grant for Outstanding New American Play by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Joseph's New York productions include Guards at the Taj (Atlantic Theater Company, 2015) which was awarded the Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award, 2016 Obie Award for Best New Play and the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Play, The North Pool (Vineyard Theater, 2013), Animals Out of Paper (Second Stage Theatre, 2008), The Leopard and the Fox (Alter Ego, 2007), Huck & Holden (Cherry Lane Theatre, 2006), and All This Intimacy (Second Stage Theatre, 2006). Joseph wrote for the Showtime series Nurse Jackie for seasons 3 and 4 and was the co-screenwriter of the film Draft Day, starring Kevin Costner and Jennifer Garner. He is the book writer and co-lyricist for the musical Fly which premiered at the Dallas Theater Center.
in 2013.

WORLD PREMIERE
CLEO
By Lawrence Wright

A comedy about the titanic love affair between Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton during the filming of 1963’s Cleopatra that created a worldwide scandal.

Set during the filming of the disastrous 1963 movie Cleopatra, Cleo is the story of the scandalous romance of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Their relationship brought condemnation from the Vatican and the US Congress, and it opened the age of paparazzi and tabloid celebrity, ensuring that the names Burton and Taylor would always be associated with the greatest sex scandal in ancient history. Acclaimed director and actor Bob Balaban (Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Gosford Park and multiple films with Christopher Guest including Waiting for Guffman and Best in Show) directs.

Lawrence Wright is the author of Going Clear, The Terror Years, Thirteen Days in September and The Looming Tower (Pulitzer Prize). HBO’s documentary Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief, is based on Wright’s book Going Clear. Also on HBO is the documentary My Trip To Al-Qaeda, a firsthand account of Wright’s experience researching his 2006 book The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11. HULU recently announced plans for a new TV series of Wright’s The Looming Tower starring Jeff Daniels and Tahar Rahim set to premiere later this year. Wright resides in Austin, TX.

THE GREAT SOCIETY
By Robert Schenkkan

The sensational political drama about LBJ continues where the Tony Award-winning Alley smash All the Way left off.

The tumultuous beginning of Lyndon Johnson’s presidency was dramatized by Robert Schenkkan in his Tony Award-winning play All the Way -seen in a spectacular Alley production last season. The LBJ journey continues in part two, The Great Society. From 1965 to 1968, LBJ struggles to fight a war on poverty even as his war in Vietnam spins out of control. Besieged by political opponents, Johnson marshals all his political wiles while the country descends into chaos over the war and backlash against civil rights.

An Austin native and University of Texas graduate, Schenkkan is the author of The Kentucky Cycle, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and has written and published fourteen other full length plays – including By The Waters of Babylon, Lewis and Clark Reach the Euphrates, The Marriage of Miss Hollywood and King Neptune, Handler, Heaven on Earth, Tachinoki and Final Passages. Robert is also co-screenwriter of the recent film Hacksaw Ridge, directed by Mel Gibson. Schenkkan’s current play Building the Wall is set in 2019 during the Trump administration and had its world premiere rollout at the Fountain Theatre in Los Angeles in March.

WORLD PREMIERE
LOVER, BELOVED
An Evening With Carson McCullers
Written and Performed by Suzanne Vega
Songs by Duncan Sheik and Suzanne Vega

Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter Suzanne Vega’s celebration of renowned Southern writer Carson McCullers. Music by Suzanne Vega and Tony Award-winner Duncan Sheik (Spring Awakening).

Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter Suzanne Vega pays homage to renowned Southern writer Carson McCullers (The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, The Member of the Wedding) in this new play with music about the outspoken, perceptive and wild dreamer who became one of the brightest literary lights of the 20th century. The songs, co-authored by Duncan Sheik (Tony Award for Spring Awakening), richly capture McCullers’ instinctively rebellious nature and forward-thinking philosophies on race, gender and love.

Widely regarded as one of the most brilliant songwriters of her generation, Suzanne Vega emerged as a leading figure of the folk-music revival in the early 1980s. Since her debut 25 years ago she has sold over 7 million albums and has been nominated for 7 Grammy awards. Suzanne tours constantly and plays sold-out concerts in many of the world’s best-known halls. Vega recently released the album "Lover, Beloved: Songs From an Evening With Carson McCullers."

Duncan Sheik, a singer/songwriter, earned two Tony Awards and a Grammy for the musical Spring Awakening. His theatre credits include American Psycho (2016), Because of Winn Dixie (Delaware Theatre Company 2015), and Whisper House (Old Globe Theater 2011). His recorded works include American Psycho (Original London Cast Recording 2006), Legerdemain (2015), Covers 80s (Sneaky Records 2011), Whisper House (Sony 2009), Spring Awakening (Original Broadway Cast Recording), White Limousine (Rounder 2006), Daylight (Atlantic Records 2002), Phantom Moon (Nonesuch 2001), Humming (Atlantic Records 1998) and Duncan Sheik (Grammy Nomination “Best Male Vocal”, RIAA Certified Gold) (Atlantic Records 1996).

While writer and performer Suzanne Vega brings Carson McCullers to life on the Neuhaus Theatre stage, playwright Terry Teachout explores the life of another groundbreaking American artist - Louis Armstrong - in Satchmo at the Waldorf on the Hubbard Theatre stage. These two Southern artists, both considered outsiders, forged their own path to become two of the most important creative minds of their time.

SATCHMO AT THE WALDORF
By Terry Teachout

A moving portrait of Louis Armstrong that looks into the mind of an American musical genius and the man behind the legend.

March 1971. Backstage at the Empire Room of New York’s Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Louis Armstrong, the greatest trumpet player in the world, sits in his dressing room trying to pull himself together to do one final show. Because as long as they clap, Louis will go out there and play. His mind wanders through the amazing journey of his life and his complex relationship with his manager Joe Glaser. In a tour de force performance, one actor journeys into the mind and heart of an American musical genius and the man behind the legend.

Terry Teachout, a theatre reviewer for the Wall Street Journal, wrote a 2009 biography on Armstrong titled “Pops: A Life of Louis Armstrong”. Satchmo at the Waldorf is his first play.
PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE
By Steve Martin

Comedian, actor, and writer Steve Martin’s hilarious imagining of Pablo Picasso and Albert Einstein’s meeting in a Parisian cafe.

Paris. 1904. Picasso and Einstein walk into a bar. Humorous, contemplative and wholly imaginative, comedian and film star turned playwright Steve Martin’s play surprises and provokes. Jumping off from the notion that these two great men were close in age and in Paris at the same time, Martin leaps into a fantastical contemplation of what they might have discussed and who else might have joined them at the Lapin Agile bar.

Picasso at the Lapin Agile was the first play written by actor/comedian Steve Martin. He began his career on “The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour” (1967–1969), for which he earned his first Emmy Award for Outstanding Writing Achievement in Comedy, Variety or Music in 1969. Martin is an accomplished, Grammy Award-winning, boundary-pushing bluegrass banjoist and composer who has won three Grammys for performing and composing. He has earned numerous honors including an Academy Award, five Grammy Awards, an Emmy Award, the Mark Twain Prize, and the Kennedy Center Honor. He has appeared in films including The Jerk, All of Me, Little Shop of Horrors, Father of the Bride, The Pink Panther and The Pink Panther 2. Martin collaborated with singer/songwriter Edie Brickell on the Tony nominated Broadway production Bright Star.

HOLMES AND WATSON
By Jeffrey Hatcher
Based on the characters of Arthur Conan Doyle

A new Sherlock Holmes adventure by the author of Sherlock Holmes and The Adventure of the Suicide Club and the award-winning 2015 film Mr. Holmes.

Three years after the mysterious death of beloved detective Sherlock Holmes off Reichenbach Falls, Dr. John H. Watson receives a telegram that suggest his old friend may still be alive. The mysterious wire was sent from a doctor who states that three patients in his asylum’s care have each claimed to be the late Sherlock Holmes. Watson embarks on a journey to disprove these claims. Could Sherlock Holmes really be alive after all this time? Holmes and Watson is a riveting new adventure from award-winning writer Jeffrey Hatcher.

Hatcher, author of Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of the Suicide Club, wrote the screenplay to the 2015 film Mr. Holmes, which starred Ian McKellen. Hatcher has written more than 40 plays including Broadway’s Never Gonna Dance (book) and Off-Broadway productions Three Viewings and A Picasso at Manhattan Theatre Club, Scotland Road and The Turn of the Screw at Primary Stages, and Tuesdays with Morrie (with Mitch Albom) at The Minetta Lane. Hatcher also wrote the screenplay for Stage Beauty, based on his play Compleat Female Stage Beauty. His additional film and TV credits include Casanova, The Duchess, and episodes of Columbo.

THE CAKE
By Bekah Brunstetter

A reality TV baking show, complex moral questions, and loads of butter make up the
recipe for this brilliant comedy about three women trying to reach out across a divide that keeps growing.

Jen lives in New York but has always dreamed of getting married in her native North Carolina. With the wedding six months away, she heads down South to ask Della, her late mother’s best friend who owns a bakery there, to do the honors of making her wedding cake. Della’s cakes are the best—she’s going to compete on the Great American Baking Show, no big deal. Della is overjoyed to make Jen’s cake—until she realizes that there isn’t just one bride, but two. She can’t really bake a cake for such a wedding, can she? Moral quandaries, reality TV and loads and loads of butter form this play by Bekah Brunstetter (NBC’s *This Is Us*) about three women trying to reach out across a divide that just keeps growing.

Inspired by Brunstetter’s upbringing in North Carolina, the themes and circumstances in *The Cake* continue to appear in the news. Brunstetter has previously written for MTV (*Underemployed; I Just Want My Pants Back*), ABC Family’s *Switched at Birth*, and Starz’s upcoming series *American Gods*. She is currently a Co-Producer on NBC’s hit show, *This Is Us*.

“The plays in the new Alley’s 2017-18 Season offer a wide variety of brilliant and engaging writing - and each of them reveals something unique about the way we live,” says Artistic Director Gregory Boyd, “from Rajiv Joseph’s epic and inspired new play to Lawrence Wright’s vivid and hilarious response to Hollywood’s greatest sex scandal, to Bekah Brunstetter’s moving comedy and Suzanne Vega’s soulful re-imaging of an artist’s wounded spirit, to the wild and crazy comic imagination of Steve Martin, and surprising new incarnations of larger than life American heroes - and anti-heroes - these playwrights have created worlds that are as reverberant as they are exhilarating, entertaining, emotionally resonant and insightful.”

The third annual *Alley All New Festival* will open 2018. The festival focuses on giving local audiences and theatre professionals from around the country the first opportunity to view works-in-progress, meet the artists, and immerse themselves in the world of new play development. Dates and titles to be announced.


In addition to the eight productions in the 2017-2018 Season, ExxonMobil’s Summer Chills returns in July with the comedy thriller *Alfred Hitchcock’s The 39 Steps*. The play is packed with nonstop laughs and includes over 150 eccentric characters played by four actors. A riotous blend of virtuoso performances and wildly inventive stagecraft, *The 39 Steps* amounts to an unforgettable evening of pure pleasure.

**THE 2017-2018 ALLEY THEATRE SEASON**

**WORLD PREMIERE**

**DESCRIBE THE NIGHT**

By Rajiv Joseph  
Directed by Giovanna Sardelli  
**Previews Begin:** September 15, 2017
In 1920, the Russian writer Isaac Babel wanders the countryside with the Red Cavalry. Seventy years later, a mysterious KGB agent spies on a woman in Dresden and falls in love. In 2010, an aircraft carrying most of the Polish government crashes in the Russian city of Smolensk. Rajiv Joseph (Gruesome Playground Injuries, The Monster at the Door, Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo) returns to the Alley with his epic new play Describe the Night which traces the stories of seven men and women connected by history, myth and conspiracy theories. Describe the Night was commissioned by the Alley Theatre.

#DescribeTheNight

WORLD PREMIERE
CLEO
By Lawrence Wright
Directed by Bob Balaban
Previews Begin: September 29, 2017
Open: October 4, 2017
Close: October 22, 2017
Hubbard Theatre

Set during the filming of the disastrous 1963 movie Cleopatra, Cleo is the story of the scandalous romance of Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Their relationship brought condemnation from the Vatican and the US Congress, and it opened the age of paparazzi and tabloid celebrity, ensuring that the names Burton and Taylor would always be associated with the greatest sex scandal in ancient history, that of Antony and Cleopatra. Acclaimed director and actor Bob Balaban (Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Gosford Park and multiple films with Christopher Guest including Waiting for Guffman and Best in Show) directs.

#AlleyCleo

Holiday Classic Returns
A CHRISTMAS CAROL – A GHOST STORY OF CHRISTMAS
By Charles Dickens
Adapted and originally directed by Michael Wilson
Directed by James Black
Previews Begin: November 17, 2017
Open: November 19, 2017
Close: December 30, 2017
Hubbard Theatre

Houston’s seasonal favorite described by the Houston Press as having “Spectacular London sets... the inimitable Dickens’ tale – spiced with the usual fog and an unusual twist on the ghosts past, present and future.” A Christmas Carol - A Ghost Story of Christmas returns this year with a re-telling of Charles Dickens’ classic story, which follows Ebenezer Scrooge’s journey with the three ghostly spirits who visit him on Christmas Eve. A Christmas Carol instills a powerful message about redemption and the spirit of the holiday season.

#ChristmasCarolHOU

Houston Favorite Returns!
THE SANTALAND DIARIES
By David Sedaris
Adapted for the stage by Joe Mantello
Directed by David Cromer
**Previews Begin:** November 30, 2017
**Open:** December 2, 2017
**Close:** December 31, 2017
Neuhaus Theatre

Company Artist Todd Waite reprises his role as “Crumpet the Elf” in the outlandish, and true, chronicles of David Sedaris’ experience as a worker in Macy’s SantaLand display. This compact, one-character comedy is a hilarious cult classic, featuring comic encounters during the height of the holiday crunch. NPR humorist and best-selling author of *Let’s Explore Diabetes With Owls*, David Sedaris has become one of America’s preeminent humorists.

#TinyCrumpet

**THE GREAT SOCIETY**
By Robert Schenkkan
Directed by Kevin Moriarty
Co-production with Dallas Theater Center
**Previews Begin:** January 26, 2018
**Open:** January 31, 2018
**Close:** February 18, 2018
Hubbard Theatre

The tumultuous beginning of Lyndon Johnson’s presidency was dramatized by Robert Schenkkan in his Tony Award-winning play *All the Way* -seen in a spectacular Alley production last season. The LBJ journey continues in part two, *The Great Society*. From 1965 to 1968, LBJ struggles to fight a war on poverty even as his war in Vietnam spins out of control. Besieged by political opponents, Johnson marshals all his political wiles while the country descends into chaos over the war and backlash against civil rights.

#GreatSocietyLBJ

**WORLD PREMIERE**
**LOVER, BELOVED**
An Evening With Carson McCullers
Written and Performed by Suzanne Vega
Songs by Duncan Sheik and Suzanne Vega
Directed by Jackson Gay
**Previews Begin:** February 9, 2018
**Open:** February 14, 2018
**Close:** March 11, 2018
Neuhaus Theatre

Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter Suzanne Vega pays homage to renowned Southern writer Carson McCullers (*The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, The Member of the Wedding*) in this new play with music about the outspoken, perceptive and wild dreamer who became one of the brightest literary lights of the 20th century. The songs, co-authored by Duncan Sheik (Tony Award for *Spring Awakening*), richly capture McCullers’ instinctively rebellious nature and forward-thinking philosophies on race, gender and love.

#LoverBeloved
**SATCHMO AT THE WALDORF**  
By Terry Teachout  
Directed by Gordon Edelstein  
**Previews Begin:** March 2, 2018  
**Open:** March 7, 2018  
**Close:** March 25, 2018  
Hubbard Theatre  
March 1971. Backstage at the Empire Room of New York’s Waldorf Astoria Hotel. Louis Armstrong, the greatest trumpet player in the world, sits in his dressing room trying to pull himself together to do one final show. Because as long as they clap, Louis will go out there and play. His mind wanders through the amazing journey of his life and his complex relationship with his manager Joe Glaser. In a tour de force performance, one actor journeys into the mind and heart of an American musical genius and the man behind the legend.  
#ArmstrongAtTheAlley

**PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE**  
By Steve Martin  
Directed by Gregory Boyd  
**Previews Begin:** April 20, 2018  
**Open:** April 25, 2018  
**Close:** May 13, 2018  
Hubbard Theatre  
Paris. 1904. Picasso and Einstein walk into a bar. Humorous, contemplative and wholly imaginative, comedian and film star turned playwright Steve Martin’s play surprises and provokes. Jumping off from the notion that these two great men were close in age and in Paris at the same time, Martin leaps into a fantastical contemplation of what they might have discussed and who else might have joined them at the Lapin Agile bar. Artistic Director Gregory Boyd directs the Alley Resident Acting Company in this toast to the twentieth century.  
#PicassoAtTheAlley

**HOLMES AND WATSON**  
By Jeffrey Hatcher  
Directed by Mark Shanahan  
**Previews Begin:** June 1, 2018  
**Open:** June 6, 2018  
**Close:** July 1, 2018  
Hubbard Theatre  
Three years after the mysterious death of beloved detective Sherlock Holmes off Reichenbach Falls, Dr. John H. Watson receives a telegram that suggest his old friend may still be alive. The mysterious wire was sent from a doctor who states that three patients in his asylum’s care have each claimed to be the late Sherlock Holmes. Watson embarks on a journey to disprove these claims. Could Sherlock Holmes really be alive after all this time? **Holmes and Watson** is a riveting new adventure from award-winning writer Jeffrey Hatcher.  
#HolmesinHouston

**THE CAKE**  
By Bekah Brunstetter  
**Previews Begin:** June 15, 2018
Open: June 20, 2018  
Close: July 15, 2018  
Neuhaus Theatre

Jen lives in New York but has always dreamed of getting married in her native North Carolina. With the wedding six months away, she heads down South to ask Della, her late mother’s best friend who owns a bakery there, to do the honors of making her wedding cake. Della’s cakes are the best—she’s going to compete on the Great American Baking Show, no big deal. Della is overjoyed to make Jen’s cake—until she realizes that there isn’t just one bride, but two. She can’t really bake a cake for such a wedding, can she? Moral quandaries, reality TV and loads and loads of butter form this play by Bekah Brunstetter (NBC’s This Is Us) about three women trying to reach out across a divide that just keeps growing.

#AlleyCake

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Previously announced 2017 Summer Chills:

ALFRED HITCHCOCK’S THE 39 STEPS
Adapted by Patrick Barlow  
Directed by Mark Shanahan  
Previews Begin: July 21, 2017  
Open: July 26, 2017  
Close: August 20, 2017  
Hubbard Theatre

ExxonMobil’s Summer Chills returns in July with the comedy thriller Alfred Hitchcock’s The 39 Steps. Packed with nonstop laughs and over 150 eccentric characters (played by four actors) the play is about a man with an ordinary life who meets a woman with a strong accent who says she’s a spy. When he takes her home, she is murdered. Soon, a mysterious organization called "The 39 Steps" is hot on the man's trail in a nationwide manhunt that climaxes in a death-defying finale. A riotous blend of virtuoso performances and wildly inventive stagecraft, The 39 Steps amounts to an unforgettable evening of pure pleasure. Mark Shanahan returns to the Alley to direct The 39 Steps.

#The39Steps

ABOUT THE ALLEY THEATRE: The Alley Theatre, Houston’s Tony Award-winning non-profit professional theatre company, is committed to creating theatre at the highest level, and sharing it with the widest audience.

The Alley produces up to 14 plays each year in our 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 Artists. They are part of a creative staff numbering nearly 200. In addition, the Alley engages theatre-artists of every discipline – actors, directors, designers, composers, playwrights – who work on individual productions throughout each season as visiting artists.

The productions the Alley mounts are built and rehearsed on-site in the theatre's production center - 75,000 square feet of shops specializing in scenery construction, costume construction, properties, wigs, lighting and sound design. The Alley's rehearsal studios, workshops, large
costume collection, and technical workshops are also all on-site in the theatre's downtown location – a facility unique among American theatre companies.

The Company reaches over 200,000 people each year through its performances and education programs. Our audience enrichment programs include pre-show and post-performance talks, events, and workshops for audience members of all ages.

After a year-long, $46.5 million renovation during the 2014-15 season, the Alley Theatre now has one of the most technically advanced non-profit theatre complexes in the nation.

**TICKET AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION:** Season Tickets can be ordered online (alleytheatre.org) or by phone (713.220.5700). Subscribers can purchase a 5-play package containing *Cleo, The Great Society, Picasso at the Lapin Agile, Satchmo at the Waldorf, and Holmes and Watson*; prices range from $125-$465. An 8-play package is also available containing all the plays in the 5-play package plus *Describe The Night, Lover, Beloved and The Cake*, with prices from $198-$649. Subscribers may purchase priority tickets for *Alfred Hitchcock’s The 39 Steps, A Christmas Carol* and *The 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.

Single tickets for *Alfred Hitchcock’s The 39 Steps* go on sale May 15, 2017 and can be purchased either online (alleytheatre.org) or by phone (713.220.5700). The remaining productions for the 2017-2018 Season will go on sale on August 28, 2017. Discounted tickets are available for any student, regardless of age, with a valid student ID for $16 for designated performances in designated sections. Military and senior discounts are available. Visit alleytheatre.org/discounts for more information.

**SPONSOR:** The Alley Theatre is supported by the 2017-2018 season sponsor United Airlines, the official airline of the Alley Theatre.

**PRESS MATERIALS:** alleytheatre.org/press

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