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**The 5th Avenue Theatre Celebrates
a New Season of Love with a Fresh Take on
*RENT***

July 21-August 19, 2012

Music and Lyrics by Jonathan Larson; Directed by Bill Berry

(Thursday, May 24, 2012 – SEATTLE, WA) It's a brand new season of love this summer when **The 5th Avenue Theatre** brings a bold and innovative production of ***RENT*** to the stage. Fresh from his smash success with *First Date*, **Bill Berry** directs this electrifying new staging of **Jonathan Larson's** modern rock-opera classic. A cast of Seattle's young rising theater stars, featuring **Daniel Berryman, Aaron C. Finley, Naomi Morgan, Jerick Hoffer, Ryah Nixon, and Andi Alhadeff** will take center stage, belting hits including "La Vie Boheme," "Take Me or Leave Me," "One Song Glory," and "Rent." Based on the Puccini opera *La bohème*, the hit musical premiered in 1996 to instant acclaim, and swept a host of theater awards — the Tony, the Obie, and the Pulitzer.

"The 5th Avenue Theatre has a longstanding tradition of cultivating our fantastic Seattle-based talent pool," said Executive Producer and Artistic Director **David Armstrong**. "Many of the stars of *RENT* are performers that you have seen on smaller stages around Seattle. Ten years ago our acclaimed production of *Hair* introduced a vibrant new crop of musical theater artists to Seattle audiences. Many of these performers have gone on to local and national acclaim. With this production, we are poised to do that all over again!"

RENT plays **July 21 – August 19, 2012** (*press opening July 26*) at **The 5th Avenue Theatre** (1308 5th Ave, Seattle, WA 98101). Tickets (starting at \$29.00) may be purchased at www.5thavenue.org, by phone at 206-625-1900, or at the Box Office at 1308 5th Avenue in downtown Seattle.

About the Director

Director **Bill Berry** can still recall the first time he saw *RENT* in 1996 as a young director studying for his MFA at Brooklyn College. After waiting in line all day for a \$20 ticket, he sat awestruck in the front row.

"*RENT* is the musical that defined a brand new generation of theatre-goers, and has since become an anthem of youth, vitality, and rebellion" says Berry. "But more than anything, this is a musical about survival, and about embracing every moment as though there will never be another. I think that's why it has such universal and timeless appeal."

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Bill Berry is the Producing Director of The 5th Avenue Theatre and recently received wide acclaim for his direction of the new musical *First Date*, a co-production between The 5th Avenue Theatre and ACT – A Contemporary Theatre. Berry has also directed 5th Avenue Theatre hit productions of *On the Town*, *West Side Story* (*Seattle Times* Footlight Award), *Wonderful Town* (*Seattle Times* Footlight Award), *Smokey Joe's Café* and *The Wizard of Oz*. He also directed *On the Town* at Paper Mill Playhouse. His re-imagined production of *Cabaret* received awards in St. Paul and Houston and has been performed at The 5th Avenue Theatre, The Ordway, the American Musical Theatre of San Jose, and Theatre Under The Stars.

Berry also produces and directs the education and outreach programs for The 5th Avenue Theatre. This year, The 5th Avenue Awards Honoring High School Musical Theatre (a program Berry created shortly after he began at The 5th) celebrates its tenth anniversary. He also spearheaded the creation of "Fridays At The 5th," a workshop series that gives high school students the opportunity to learn directly from 5th Avenue Theater professionals, and launched Show Talks, a conversation series with local theater scholars and experts that explores the themes and ideas behind the work onstage. Berry has substantially increased the reach of The 5th Avenue Theatre's Adventure Musical Theatre Touring Company (AMT), which brings original, topical musical theater productions to schools all throughout the Pacific Northwest. In addition to directing these productions, he has written the book for two AMT productions: *Klondike*, the story of the Alaskan Gold Rush, and *Journey West!*, a musical based on the Lewis and Clark expedition.

About the Cast

Daniel Berryman makes his 5th Avenue debut as East Village filmmaker Mark Cohen. The Roosevelt High School alum graduates this year with a B.F.A. in Musical Theater from University of Michigan, and has performed in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* at Seattle Public Theatre. Berryman starred in *Yellow Wood* at Contemporary Classics, and has performed in numerous editions of the popular Contemporary Classics series, *New Voices*.

Aaron C. Finley and **Naomi Morgan** join this outstanding ensemble as Roger Davis and Mimi Márquez. Finley returns to the 5th Avenue where he previously appeared in *A Christmas Story* and *One Love*. He has also appeared throughout Seattle at Village Theatre, Taproot Theatre, The Banff Center, Centerstage Theatre, and ArtsWest, among others. Naomi Morgan has previously performed on The 5th Avenue stage in *Cinderella*, and *West Side Story*, in addition to touring with The 5th Avenue's Adventure Musical Theatre Touring Company. Morgan has performed in *The Full Monty* and *The Gypsy King* at Village Theatre, and has also graced the stage in productions of the Contemporary Classics series, *New Voices*.

Rising super-star **Jerick Hoffer** will play opposite 5th Avenue favorite **Brandon O'Neill** as the lovers Angel Dumott Schunard and Tom Collins. Hoffer was lauded for his recent portrayal of Moritz in Balagan Theater's *Spring Awakening*, and has credits at local theaters including ArtsWest, Seattle Shakespeare, and Book-It Repertory Theatre. He is perhaps best-known locally for his drag persona Jinkx Monsoon. Brandon O'Neill recently made his ACT debut in *First Date*, and has performed many times at The 5th, including the recent

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productions of *Rodgers & Hammerstein's Cinderella*, *Saving Aimee*, *Aladdin*, and *Guys and Dolls*, among many others.

Seattle native **Ryah Nixon** returns to Seattle to portray Maureen Johnson. Nixon first performed on The 5th Avenue stage as a Roosevelt High School student in The 5th Avenue Awards Honoring High School Musical Theater, and returned last season in the national tour of *9 to 5: The Musical*. She most recently appeared in The 5th's highly-praised concert presentation of *Titanic: The Musical*. Nixon has performed Off-Broadway in *Another Part of the Forest* and has performed at Village Theatre as Princess Amneris in *Aida*. **Andi Alhadeff** plays opposite Nixon as public interest lawyer Joanne Jefferson. The Seattle native performed in the ensemble of The 5th's production of *The Sound of Music* and now makes her debut as a principal performer. She recently graduated from Northwestern University with a B.A. in Theatre.

Logan Benedict rounds out this remarkable troupe as landlord Benjamin Coffin III. Coffin's 5th Avenue credits include roles in *7 Brides for 7 Brothers* and *Into the Woods*. He has performed throughout the Northwest at organizations including Village Theatre, Lyric Light Opera, and Seattle Public Theater.

Also living "la vie bohème" as the ensemble are **Eric Ankrim**, **Sarah Rose Davis**, **Antonia Darlene**, **Kirsten deLoehr Helland**, **Jimmie D. Herrod Jr.**, **Diana Huey**, **Andrew Leonard**, **Trina Mills**, **Casey Raiha**, **Heath Saunders**, and **Patrick Shelton**. Performance interns **Bryan Gula**, **Lindsay Hedberg**, **Henry Nettleton**, and **Sarah Russell** also join the ensemble as various residents of the East Village.

About Jonathan Larson

New Yorker **Jonathan Larson** never knew what a sensational success his musical *RENT* would become. The exceptionally talented composer/lyricist passed away due to an aortic dissection on January 25, 1996 — the morning of *RENT*'s first scheduled Off-Broadway preview. The show quickly moved to a Broadway run and swept a host of theater awards that year, including the Tony, the Obie, and the Pulitzer. The show would run for the next 12 years on Broadway, closing in 2008. It is the ninth longest-running show in Broadway history.

Always involved in theater and music from a young age, Larson attended Adelphi University on Long Island where he pursued a B.A. in acting. It was at Adelphi that Larson met his idol (and later mentor) Stephen Sondheim. Upon graduation, Larson relocated to the gritty East Village in Manhattan, where he would find the inspiration for his future hit, *RENT*. Living in an apartment with no heat and working in a diner on the weekends, Larson lived the kind of impoverished life that would become a major theme of his work. During this time in New York, Larson wrote and composed many theatrical pieces, his most successful being the Off-Broadway hit *tick...tick...BOOM!*

About the Music Director

R.J. Tancioco joins the *RENT* team as music director. He is the recipient of a 2010 Gregory Award and a 2012 Gypsy Rose Lee Award. In addition, he is an active arranger, conductor, vocal coach, and music director throughout Seattle. Tancioco recently acted as musical director for the hit ACT/5th Avenue co-production *First Date*. His additional 5th Avenue credits include *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*, *Hair*, and *Smokey Joe's Café*. He has also worked at a number of other Seattle theaters, including Village Theatre, Balagan Theatre, and *New Voices* for Contemporary Classics.

About the Choreographer

Daniel Cruz has performed at The 5th numerous times, but makes his 5th Avenue choreographic debut with *RENT*. He recently choreographed several works for Village Theatre including *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Disney's Beauty and the Beast* (co-choreographer), and *Elton John and Tim Rice's Aida* (assistant choreographer). Cruz also is an accomplished performer who served as a co-dance captain on the 1st National Tour of the Tony Award-winning musical *In The Heights*. He is also the choreographer and director of Cruz Control, a Seattle hip-hop company.

The Design Team

The design team for *RENT* includes **Martin Christoffel** (Set Design), **Pete Rush** (Costume Design), **Mary Pyanowski** (Hair and Makeup Design), **Tom Sturge** (Lighting Design), and **Kai Harada** (Sound Design). Also on the team are **Adam Quinn** (Assistant Director), **Eric Ankrim** (Assistant Director), **Chris Ranney** (Assistant Music Director), **Christian DeAngelis** (Associate Lighting Design), and **Andrea Bush** (Assistant Set Design).

About The 5th Avenue Theatre

The 5th Avenue Theatre is one of the nation's premier incubators for new musical theater. Since 2002, the celebrated company has produced 13 new musicals. Five have moved on to Broadway premieres, earning a combined 14 Tony Awards, including two for Best Musical (*Hairspray* and *Memphis*). The 5th Avenue Theatre is also known for its world class, critically acclaimed productions of musicals chosen from both the contemporary canon and the Golden Age of Broadway.

Unique in its Chinese-inspired design, this exquisite theater opened in 1926 as a venue for vaudeville and film. In 1980, the non-profit 5th Avenue Theatre began producing and presenting top-quality live musical theater. Today, under the leadership of Executive Producer and Artistic Director David Armstrong, Managing Director Bernadine C. Griffin and Producing Director Bill Berry, The 5th Avenue Theatre attracts an annual attendance of more than 287,000 and ranks among the nation's largest and most respected musical theater companies.

In addition to its main stage productions, The 5th Avenue Theatre is also committed to encouraging the next generation of theatergoers through its extensive educational outreach program which includes: The Adventure Musical Theatre Touring Company, The 5th Avenue Awards Honoring High School Musical Theatre, the Student Matinee Program, and

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Spotlight Nights. For more information about The 5th Avenue Theatre, its season and its programs, please visit www.5thavenue.org.

Special thanks to The 5th Avenue Theatre 2011/12 season co-sponsors Safeco Insurance and US Bank, and media sponsor *The Seattle Times*. Additional thanks to *Damn Yankees* production sponsors Puget Sound Energy, the Washington State Arts Commission, the Mayor's Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, and Encore Media Group.

FOR CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT: It's a brand new season of love this summer when **The 5th Avenue Theatre** takes a bold and innovative look at **Jonathan Larson's** contemporary classic, ***RENT***. Following the smash hit, *First Date*, The 5th's own **Bill Berry** directs this spectacular re-imagining of the '90s rock musical hit. A cast of Seattle's young rising theater stars, including **Daniel Berryman, Aaron C. Finley, Naomi Morgan,** and **Ryah Nixon,** will take center stage, belting hits including "La Vie Boheme," "Take Me or Leave Me," "One Song Glory," and of course, "Rent."

Set during the height of the AIDS epidemic, *RENT* is the electrifying tale of impoverished young artists struggling to survive while living in New York's East Village. Based on the Puccini opera *La bohème*, the hit musical premiered in 1996 to instant acclaim, and swept a host of theater awards — the Tony, the Obie, and the Pulitzer.

WHEN: *Previews: July 21-July 25, 2012*
Opening Night: July 26, 2012 (press night)
Closing Performance: August 19, 2012

SHOW Tuesdays & Wednesdays – 7:30 PM
TIMES: Thursdays & Fridays – 8:00 PM
Saturdays – 2:00 PM & 8:00 PM
Sundays – 1:30 PM & 7:00 PM
No evening performance on 8/5
Added performances on 8/2 at 1:30 PM

WHERE: **The 5th Avenue Theatre** (1308 5th Avenue, Seattle)

TICKETS: For single tickets (starting at \$29.00) and information, please visit www.5thavenue.org or call the box office at (206) 625-1900. Tickets may also be purchased at (888) 5TH-4TIX.

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