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STEP RIGHT UP...

**UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA
TO PRESENT GEORGE BRANT'S GRIPPING DRAMA
ELEPHANT'S GRAVEYARD FROM MARCH 21-24**

**POWERFUL THEATRE EXPERIENCE TO SERVE AS CENTERPIECE OF
FOUR-DAY CELEBRATION OF THE AMERICAN CIRCUS
AND U.VA.'S WORLD-RENOWNED CIRCUS HISTORIAN LAVAHN HOH**

**Highlights To Include Post-Show Discussions on Cultural Impact of Circus As Well
As On "The Art of Clowning"; Keenan Lecture With Playwright George Brant And
Special Family Performance By Renowned Bindlestiff Family Cirkus**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA – February 29, 2012 – George Brant's gripping drama *Elephant's Graveyard*, opening at Culbreth Theatre on March 21, will serve as the centerpiece of a four-day University of Virginia Drama Department celebration of the art of the American Circus, and the extraordinary career of its own LaVahn Hoh.

Elephant's Graveyard is the story of the collision between a struggling circus and a tiny Tennessee town in 1916, and how it resulted in the only-known lynching of an elephant. The play combines historical fact and legend to tell the true and tragic tale, using first-person narrative to relay the perspectives of the circus folk and townspeople alike, and in the process capturing America's unique thirst for spectacle, violence and revenge.

Elephant's Graveyard, directed by Richard Warner, will be presented at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, March 21 through Saturday, March 24. Ticket prices \$14 for adults, \$12 for seniors and U.Va. faculty, staff and alumni association members and \$8 for students. Tickets are available online at www.artsboxoffice.virginia.edu, by calling 434-924-3376 or in-person from noon until 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday at the U.Va. Arts Box Office, located in the lobby of the Culbreth Theatre building.

"One of the truly fascinating things about this play is you have these two points of view," Warner said. "You have the circus, and their love and enthusiasm for Mary, this elephant, who is the star of their show. And you have the town, which has such great enthusiasm for the circus coming to town only to see this horrific event happen, which in turn creates an even bigger spectacle."

The “group tell” format, Warner said, makes the story even more compelling. “You have these 15 people on stage, and they are telling it together. The one thing I really admire about the play is that there are no images whatsoever of Mary. It is all in the imagination of the audience. It’s the simple power of everything that is defining in theater. So the bottom line is, it’s about storytelling, much like the radio dramas that our grandparents or great grandparents grew up with as they imagined these stories that actors brought to life.”

The play will be combined with a series of lectures and special events that will highlight the U.Va. Drama Department’s unique academic focus on the American Circus, shared now for more than four decades by internationally-acclaimed author and circus historian LaVahn Hoh.

“LaVahn is the reason I got involved in this play,” Richard Warner said. “He and I are office mates, and as I always tell my students, he is one of the purest scholars I know. LaVahn first fell in love with the Circus when he was seven years old, in Baraboo, Wisconsin, the original winter home of Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Circus. He decided to study it, and is now one of the leading scholars/historians of circus in the entire world. LaVahn’s passion and enthusiasm for the circus is truly remarkable, and he has taught me, and so many others, the importance of an event like the circus in the American tradition and culture.”

Hoh has put together and will participate in a number of special panels over the course of the show’s run, Warner said, including post-show discussions on the first three nights of the run. “As this is a fairly short play, I see these discussions as a sort of second act,” he said. “So I went to LaVahn and said, ‘Let’s bring your friends in!’”

Those friends include **Janet M. Davis**, a renowned scholar who will join U.Va.’s own John Frick and LaVahn Hoh for a discussion entitled, “*American Culture, Society and the Circus*” following the opening night performance on the 21st.

The following night will feature a discussion on “*The Art of Clowning*” in which Hoh and Davis will be joined by **Steve Smith**, former director of Ringling’s famed Clown College and of the Big Apple Circus.

Friday’s post-show event will feature the Keenan Lecture by playwright **George Brant** and a Q&A with Brant, Davis and Hoh.

On Saturday, March 24, the circus celebration wraps up with a family treat for the entire community – a special 4pm performance by the **Bindlestiff Family Cirkus!** Founded in 1995, this New York-based company is dedicated to the celebration of circus arts, and regularly tours the United States and beyond with a unique combination of custom performances and themed shows that showcase genres ranging from circus to sideshows, Wild West shows, Vaudeville and beyond.

Tickets for this special Bindlestiff Family Cirkus performance will be \$10 for adults and \$5 for students and children, and are available online at www.artsboxoffice.virginia.edu, by calling 434-924-3376 or in-person from noon until 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday at the U.Va. Arts Box Office, located in the lobby of the Culbreth Theatre building.

The 2011-2012 UVa. Drama Department season continues with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Brantley M. Dunaway. *Romeo and Juliet* comes to the Culbreth Theatre from April 19-21 and 25-28 at 8pm and April 29 at 2pm.

Free parking for all U.Va. Drama performances is available at the Culbreth Road Parking Garage, conveniently located alongside the theaters.

For more information on the 2011-2012 U.Va. Department of Drama season, visit us online at www.virginia.edu/drama.

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