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MEDIA RELEASE

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CHARLES LUDLAM'S HILARIOUS *THE MYSTERY OF IRMA VEP* COMES TO LIFE AT ARENA STAGE

***** Rebecca Bayla Taichman directs this outrageous Obie Award winner complete with vampires, werewolves and damsels in distress—all portrayed by Brad Oscar and J. Fred Shiffman *****

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage presents Charles Ludlam's comic masterpiece *The Mystery of Irma Vep*. This clever, quick-change marathon ransacks literary, cinematic and pop culture as it satirizes everything from Hitchcock's *Rebecca* and classic horror film *The Mummy's Curse* to *Wuthering Heights* and Shakespeare. Arena Stage is excited to welcome back **Brad Oscar** (Broadway's *Spamalot* and *The Producers*, Arena's *Cabaret* and *Damn Yankees*) and **J. Fred Shiffman** (The Arthur Miller Festival, *She Loves Me*, *Cabaret*) as they portray all of the characters—men, women and monsters—in this gender-bending "tour de force." *The Mystery of Irma Vep* runs **June 6 – July 13 at Arena Stage in Crystal City. The press opening performance is Thursday, June 12 at 8:00 p.m.**

"Arena Stage is very excited to end our season on a highly entertaining, energetic note," said Artistic Director Molly Smith, "and believe me, it will take lots of energy to maintain the dozens of lightning-fast quick changes. The premise of *Irma Vep* seems silly, and it is, but it is also carefully-crafted lunacy from the brilliant mind of Charles Ludlam, the late founder of New York's acclaimed Ridiculous Theatrical Company. Ludlam and his Company were absolutely sublime, and I know that this production will be as well."

On a "dark and stormy night," Lady Enid, newly married to the controversial Lord Edgar, arrives at the large Hillcrest estate. She learns that here is where his late wife Irma Vep was murdered and that the estate is haunted by something that is prowling the moors. After Lady Enid's arrival, the residents of Hillcrest encounter an array of mythical creatures, including a werewolf, a vampire, an Egyptian princess and a mummy, and the new mistress soon realizes she must quickly crack the mystery of Irma Vep.

Director Rebecca Bayla Taichman said, "*The Mystery of Irma Vep* is not only wickedly, ferociously funny, it has true beauty: ridiculous, divine beauty. It is a hedonistic tour de force and requires super-charged-high-octane theatricality. Fred and Brad will delight, I am certain, for they are—like Ludlam and his Ridiculous team—as virtuosic as it gets."

When *The Mystery of Irma Vep* first premiered in 1984 at the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, Ludlam and his longtime partner Everett Quinton portrayed all of the characters. Ludlam wrote that he wanted to incorporate "the old vaudeville trick of the quick-change as the basis of the whole play." *Irma Vep*

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was also inspired by the "Penny Dreadful," which were cheap 19th-century publications that featured sensational fiction (similar to American dime novels). *Irma Vep* quickly gained popularity and garnered praise, awards (including a Drama Desk Award) and sold-out audiences, as well as a plethora of offers for Ludlam from film, television, operas and theaters. However, he turned those and Broadway offers down so he could continue to focus on the Ridiculous Theatrical Company.

Charles Ludlam (1943–1987) was most known for founding The Ridiculous Theatrical Company in 1967 and working with the company as a writer, director, performer and designer. The company was legendary for mixing theatrical tradition with the avant-garde. He received six Obie Awards, one of which was for Ensemble Performance in *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, and the Rosamund Gilder Award. Some of his most noted works include *Camille* (1973), *Der Ring Gott Farblonjet* (an adaptation of *The Ring Cycle*) and *Artificial Jungle* (1986). He was also acclaimed for his portrayal of the title role in the 1984 American Ibsen Theater Production of *Hedda Gabler*. Ludlam died in 1987 at the age of 44 from pneumonia as a complication of AIDS. In his obituary, *The New York Times* wrote that he was "one of the most prolific and flamboyant artists in the theatre avant-garde."

Rebecca Bayla Taichman's Off-Broadway credits include *The Scene* by Theresa Rebeck at Second Stage Theatre and *Menopausal Gentleman* at Ohio Theatre (Special Citation Obie Award). Her most recent regional credits include *The Taming of the Shrew* at The Shakespeare Theatre Company. She directed the world premieres of *The Evildoers* by David Adjmi at Yale Repertory Theatre, *Dead Man's Cell Phone* by Sarah Ruhl at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company (Helen Hayes Award Nomination), *The Velvet Sky* by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa at Woolly Mammoth, Theresa Rebeck's *Mauritius* at the Huntington Theatre Company and *The Scene* at the Humana Festival of New American Plays. Other productions include *The Clean House* at Woolly Mammoth (Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Resident Play), *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *A Body of Water* (both at Round House Theatre), *Green Violin* at Prince Music Theater (Barrymore Award, Outstanding Direction of a Musical) and *Swimming in March* at Market Theater. A graduate of Yale School of Drama, she is the recipient of a TCG New Generations Grant and Drama League Directing Fellowship and has taught at The O'Neill National Theater Institute, MIT, Yale University and the University of Maryland.

The Mystery of Irma Vep Cast:

Brad Oscar (*Lady Enid Hillcrest*, *Nicodemus Underwood*, *Alcazar*, *Pev Amri*), returns to Arena where he was last seen as the Master of Ceremonies in *Cabaret* and Mr. Applegate in *Damn Yankees*. He originated the role of Franz Liebkind in the Broadway production of *The Producers* and received a 2001 Tony nomination for his performance, and later went on to play the role of Max Bialystock over 1,200 times on Broadway, on tour, in London and in the Las Vegas production. Other Broadway and New York credits include *Spamalot*, the original casts of *Jekyll & Hyde* and *Aspects of Love*, Gerard Alessandrini's *Forbidden Broadway*, the Encores! *Do Re Mi*, as well as Santa in The Radio City Christmas Spectacular in Los Angeles and Branson. He appeared in the films *The Producers*, *Building Girl* and *Old Days* and on television in "Law and Order" and "Law and Order: Criminal Intent."

J. Fred Shiffman (*Lord Edgar Hillcrest*, *Jane Twisden*, *An Intruder*) has been an Affiliated Artist at Arena for seven seasons, having appeared in over two dozen productions dating back to 1982. He was most recently seen as Uncle Ben in *Death of a Salesman* and Mr. Lipari in *A View from the Bridge*. He has also appeared in *She Loves Me*, *Cabaret*, *Damn Yankees*, *Passion Play*, a cycle and *Anna Christie*. This past season, he appeared at The Shakespeare Theater Company in *The Taming of the Shrew*, at Studio Theatre in *Souvenir* (2008 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Lead Actor,

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Resident Play) and at Woolly Mammoth in *Vigils*. He played Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at San Diego's Old Globe and recorded *Barefoot in the Park* with Laura Linney and Eric Stoltz for L.A. Theatre Works. He has been nominated for 13 Helen Hayes Awards and has been presented with the award three times.

Miller Repertory Creative Team:

James Noone (*Set Designer*) designed *Come Back Little Sheba*, *A Bronx Tale*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *Three Tall Women*, *Full Gallop* and *Fully Committed* at Manhattan Theatre Club, Lincoln Center Theatre, Playwrights Horizons and numerous other companies. His regional credits include The Guthrie Theater, Center Theatre Group, Pittsburgh Public, Huntington Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, Shakespeare Theatre Company, Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, among others. Mr. Noone's opera credits include work at Washington National Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, New York City Opera, LA Opera, and Canadian Opera. He has also designed many national tours, as well as *Sweeney Todd*, *Candide*, *Passion* and *Camelot* for PBS.

David Zinn (*Costume Designer*)'s Broadway credits include *Xanadu* and *Tale of Two Cities* (opening next September). His Off-Broadway credits include sets and costumes for *The Four of Us* (Manhattan Theater Club), as well as sets for *Paradise Park* (Signature) and *Sound and the Fury* (NYTW). His work has also been seen at Second Stage, Theater for a New Audience, NYTW, MCC, Atlantic Theater and Target Margin Theater (Obie Award). Mr. Zinn designed the opera sets and costumes for *Tamerlano* (Washington National Opera); *Orlando*, *Flavio*, *La Donna del Lago* (New York City Opera); and *The Cunning Little Vixen* (Lyric Opera of Chicago, Houston Grand Opera). He has worked at many regional theaters including A.R.T., Huntington, La Jolla Playhouse, Mark Taper Forum, Centerstage, Berkeley Rep, Seattle Rep, Guthrie Theater, Dallas Theater Center, Intiman Theater and Children's Theater Company.

Daniel Maclean Wagner (*Lighting Designer*) has designed lighting for more than 350 productions at many theaters, including Arden Theatre Company, Berkshire Theatre Festival, Boston Lyric Opera, Philadelphia Theatre Company, Portland Stage, The Shakespeare Theatre, The John F. Kennedy Center, The Studio Theatre, Signature Theatre, Round House Theatre, Theatre of the First Amendment, Horizons Theatre, Potomac Theatre Project, The Rep Stage, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, National Players and Olney Theatre Center. He is an eight-time recipient of the Helen Hayes Award, for which he has received 27 nominations. Mr. Wagner holds the position of Associate Artist at Round House Theatre, Resident Lighting Designer at Olney Theatre Center and Artistic Associate at Signature Theatre. Mr. Wagner is Professor and Chair of the Department of Theatre, and Acting Chair of the Department of Dance at the University of Maryland.

Bray Poor (*Sound Designer*) worked on the sound design and original music for *Our Dad is in Atlantis* for Working Theater at 45 Bleecker and *Evildoers* at Yale Rep (with Rebecca Taichman). He recently co-wrote, designed the sound and wrote music for *Milk n' Honey* with lightbox at 3LD. Other credits include *Eurydice* at Second Stage and Yale Rep; *The Ruby Sunrise* at the Public and Trinity Rep; *Aphrodisiac* at PS 122 and the Long Wharf; *Shutter* at PS 122; *The White House Plays* at HB Playwrights; *Eyewitness Blues* at New York Theatre Workshop; *Kid Simple*, *Ruby Sunrise*, *Slide Glide the Slippery Slope* at the Humana Festival; *Orestes* with lightbox; and Sarah Ruhl's *Late* for Clubbed Thumb. Mr. Poor returned from living in Oaxaca, Mexico for two years where he worked on art installations including "Partes de Agua" in Oaxaca and "Inundación" in Mexico City.

David S. Leong (*Fight Choreographer*)'s previous Arena credits include the Arthur Miller repertory, *I Am a Man*, *Coming of the Hurricane* and *The Odyssey*. His Broadway credits include *Carousel*, *Ma*

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Rainey's Black Bottom, The Rainmaker, The Civil War, King Hedley, Company, Picnic, Solitary Confinement, The Homecoming, Sex and Longing, A Delicate Balance and *In the Summer House*. His choreography has also been seen in the London West End in *Napoleon* and *Jitney* at the National Theatre. Mr. Leong's work has been seen in over 250 regional theater plays and musicals at the Mark Taper Forum, Guthrie Theatre, Seattle Rep, ACT, ART, Goodman Theatre, Yale Rep, Shakespeare Theatre, Lincoln Center Theatres and many more. His fights were also seen in the films *Titus* and *Alien Resurrection*. He is currently chairman of the Department of Theatre at Virginia Commonwealth University and is one of 15 people holding the title of Certified Fight Master.

Parker Esse (*Choreographer*) returns to Arena after working on *Christmas Carol 1941* this season and assisting Baayork Lee on *Animal Crackers, South Pacific* (Helen Hayes nomination - Choreography), *Camelot* and *Damn Yankees* (Dance Captain/Performer in all shows). Recently, he assisted Ms. Lee on *Mack and Mabel* at the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Canada. Mr. Esse assisted Choreographer Warren Carlyle on *Mame* at The Kennedy Center; *Pirates of Penzance* at Goodspeed Opera House and Paper Mill Playhouse; City Center's ENCORES! production *Stairway to Paradise*; and the feature film *The Tourist* starring Hugh Jackman. Mr. Esse choreographed the world premiere of Katie Couric's *The Brand New Kid* at The Kennedy Center's Family Theatre (currently on national tour). He danced on Broadway with Ben Vereen, Bebe Neuwirth and Ann Reinking in *Fosse* (PBS's Great Performances).

Anita Maynard-Losh (*Dialect Coach*) is the Director of Community Engagement for Arena Stage and leads the theater's education and outreach programs. She also directs Camp Arena Stage, the theater's multi-arts summer camp. Ms. Maynard-Losh trained and taught at the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco, was on the faculty at Webster University in St. Louis, headed the theater department at the University of Alaska Southeast, and was the Associate Artistic Director of Perseverance Theatre in Juneau, Alaska where she directed eighteen mainstage productions. The Alaska Native-inspired production of *Macbeth* that Ms. Maynard-Losh conceived and directed was performed in English and Tlingit at the National Museum of the American Indian as part of last season's Shakespeare in Washington Festival. Ms. Maynard-Losh has been an assistant director, dialect coach and vocal consultant on numerous productions at Arena Stage and is a member of VASTA.

T. Tyler Stumpf (*Wig Designer*) also designed the wigs for *Well* this season at Arena Stage. He studied wig making at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music under the instruction of Lenna Kaleya. His hair creations have been seen locally at Actor's Theatre of Washington (*Vampire Lesbians of Sodom, Owl and the Pussycat*), Olney Theatre (*Grease, Dames at Sea*), University of Maryland (*Music Man*), Theatre of the First Amendment (*Mississippi Pinocchio*) and Signature Theatre (*Assassins*).

Stage Manager for *The Mystery of Irma Vep* is **Amber Dickerson**; Assistant Stage Manager is **Angelita Thomas**; Production Dramaturg is **Janine Sobeck**; and Directing Fellow is **Vijay Mathew**.

The Arena Stage 2007/08 Season is sponsored by Donald and Nancy de Laski.

Special events, Ticket Information and Performance Calendar:

Arena Stage Season Preview at the Lincoln Theatre – Friday, May 30 at 7:30 p.m.

1215 U Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009

Artistic Director Molly Smith will host an open house at the Lincoln Theatre and will present scenes from productions in Arena Stage's 2008/09 season. These staged readings will feature artists such as Maureen McGovern and other actors from *ARENA RESTAGED* part one, as well as Arena's Affiliated Artists and local actors. The Lincoln Theatre is the second venue to be used during *ARENA RESTAGED*--the two year festival of productions leading up to the opening of the Mead Center. This event is free to the general public; however, reservations are required. General public may reserve seats by calling the Arena Stage Sales Office at (202) 488-3300. Special seating is offered with a \$25 donation and may be reserved by calling (202) 554-9066 ext. 209.

The Salon – Monday, June 9 at 7:00 p.m. at Arena Stage in Crystal City

In the spirit of artistic and literary salons of the past, The Salon features artistic leaders from Arena Stage in a series of lively, in-depth conversations with the playwrights, actors, directors, designers, dramaturgs and audiences which make Arena Stage so unique. The Salon is free to Arena Stage subscribers and donors (\$75+), and only \$3 for the general public. Reservations must be made through the Arena Stage Sales Office at (202) 488-3300.

Southwest Night – Friday, June 13 at 8:00 p.m.

An invitation is extended to our Southwest D.C. neighbors to buy \$20 tickets, plus applicable fees, for one designated Friday evening performance of each production. Proof of Southwest D.C. residency or employment must be presented at the time of purchase. Tickets are limited to four per person and are based on availability. To purchase tickets, call (202) 488-3300 or stop by the Arena Stage Sales Office.

TICKETS: Tickets *The Mystery of Irma Vep* range from \$47-66, with discounts available for students and groups. A limited number of \$10 tickets for patrons 30 and under go on sale beginning on Monday for the following week of performances (Tuesday through Sunday) until all available \$10 tickets sell out. Patrons may purchase \$10 tickets by phone, online or in person. (All patrons must be 30 or younger.) Patrons will be required to present valid ID for age verification. HOTTIX, a limited number of half-price, day-of-performance tickets, are available from 90-30 minutes before curtain prior to every performance for all patrons. **Tickets are available for purchase online at www.arenastage.org, at the Arena Stage Sales Office at 1800 S. Bell Street, Arlington, VA 22202, or by phone at (202) 488-3300.**

Sales Office/Subscriptions (202) 488-3300

TTY for Deaf patrons (202) 484-0247

Group Sales Hotline (202) 488-4380

Info for patrons with disabilities (202) 488-3300

Tues., Wed. & Sun. at 7:30 p.m. (no evening show 6/24 & 6:00 p.m. curtain 7/6)

Thurs., Fri. & Sat. at 8:00 p.m.

Sat. & Sun. matinees at 2:00 p.m. (no matinee 6/7, 6/22 & 7/6)

Weekday matinees at 12:00 p.m. on 6/18, 6/24 & 7/2

Post show conversations: 6/18, 6/24 & 7/2 at 12:00 p.m.; 7/1 at 7:30 p.m. & 7/10 at 8:00 p.m.

Sign-interpreted performances: 7/3 at 8:00 p.m. & 7/13 at 7:30 p.m.

Audio described performances: 6/28 at 2:00 p.m. & 7/9 at 7:30 p.m.

Out at Arena post show discussion (for GLBT patrons): 6/27 at 8:00 p.m.

Building Arena Stage the Mead Center for American Theater

On January 30, 2008, Arena Stage broke ground on its 47-year-old Southwest, D.C. theater campus to commence 29 months of construction to make way for the new Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater. The Center will be a breathtaking expansion of the current campus, allowing Arena Stage to focus on the strengths of the two existing spaces – The Fichandler Stage and the Kreeger Theater—while reinventing the surrounding building and adding a 200-seat space dedicated to premiering American theater, The Robert and Arlene Kogod Cradle. The theater has currently raised more than \$108 of its \$125 million fundraising goal since the Next Stage Campaign launched in 2002. Arena Stage at the Mead Center is scheduled to open for the 2010/2011 season.

To allow for a timely and cost-effective renovation, Arena currently operates out of **Arena Stage in Crystal City**, a temporary home in Arlington, VA. A five-minute drive from the current location in Southwest, D.C., the area around Arena Stage in Crystal City boasts many well-known restaurants, is convenient to the Crystal City Metro and has free evening and weekend parking. The theater is roughly the same size as the Kreeger and seats 460 patrons. Crystal City also houses the Arena Stage administrative offices in a nearby building. In addition, starting in 2008/2009 Arena Stage will have a substantial presence at the Lincoln Theatre in Northwest, D.C. As information changes and/or becomes available throughout the transition, Arena plans to keep its website at **www.arenastage.org** as up to date as possible with Frequently Asked Questions, directions and other relevant information. Information on Arena Stage's 2008/09 season is also available online.

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