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Emerson Theatre Collaborative Announces Inaugural Production, John Patrick Shanley's Broadway Hit, *Doubt*

**New Professional Theater Group to Serve Southeastern
Connecticut Community**

July 14, 2008/Mystic, CT . . . John Patrick Shanley's Pulitzer Prize winning play *Doubt: A Parable* will be the opening production of the **Emerson Theater Collaborative**, a new professional theatre company based in southeastern Connecticut. **Emma Palzere-Rae, Stephen Daniel Sherman, Heidi Harger, and Camilla Ross** are featured in the drama. **Albert Cremin** directs the play, which will have six performances at Mystic's Union Baptist Church in mid-August.

In the play, set in the St. Nicholas Church School in The Bronx during the fall of 1964, Father Flynn asks the audience, "What do you do when you're not sure?" His colleague, Sister Aloysius, is an old-school nun who insists that her students not be coddled: "Every easy choice today will have its consequence tomorrow." Flynn, following the Second Vatican Council's directive, believes the clergy should be more accessible to the parish and be thought of "as members of their family." These two schools of thought come head to head when Aloysius suspects Flynn of "interfering" with Donald Muller, the school's first black student. Sister James, an inexperienced but enthusiastic young nun who has been an indirect witness to the dealings between Flynn and Muller, and Donald's mother, Mrs. Muller, provide two more perspectives on the central conflict. Sides are chosen and wounds are inflicted, and somewhere amongst the mayhem is the truth.

Emerson Theater Collaborative serves youth, underrepresented communities, and artists with an emphasis on diversity by producing innovative and exhilarating theater in southeastern Connecticut. By exploring timely themes and issues through original works and modern theatrical classics, ETC develops and nurtures emerging and professional artists by collaborating with the Emerson College network of alumni and students.

ETC president **Camilla Ross** states, “We looked around at the theater being offered in southeastern Connecticut and considered the people who live and visit here and we felt there was an opportunity that has been overlooked – and that is to present quality, professional theater that would entertain, inspire and get people talking and thinking. *Doubt* came to mind immediately as the kind of play we could get excited about producing and we hope the people in the region will be excited by it too.”

The company of *Doubt* features four talented actors: **Emma Palzere-Rae** (Sister Aloysius) has over 20 years experience working in all areas of professional theater including performance, artistic administration, playwriting, and producing. Ms. Palzere-Rae worked extensively in the New York City entertainment community for over fifteen years, most recently serving as the Artistic Director of Plays for Living. As an actress, Ms. Palzere-Rae has appeared Off-Broadway, at regional and stock theaters, and has been spotted in various films, commercials and soaps over the years. Locally, she has appeared at the Centennial Theater in Simsbury, and NewGate Theatre in Providence. As a producer, Ms. Palzere-Rae is the founder of Be Well Productions which tours several critically-acclaimed one-woman plays to schools, libraries, senior communities, civic organizations and professional theaters. **Stephen Daniel Sherman** (Father Flynn) appeared off-Broadway in *Tony N' Tina's Wedding*. Touring productions include *The Who's Tommy*, *Aladdin*, and *Cheap Sunglasses*. Stephen was seen last month in Madhatter Production's inaugural mounting of *Chicken Bone Beach* in NYC. He is also a member of Emerging Artists Theatre. **Heidi Harger** plays Sister James. Most recently she was seen

in Michael R. McGuire's dysfunctional family drama *Sometimes I Feel Like I Missed the Train*. Other professional roles include Georgie in *The Country Girl* at the Majestic Theater in Massachusetts; Sara Jane Moore in *Assassins* at Spirit of Broadway in Norwich; and Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, and Cassandra in *Agamemnon* with Flock Theater in New London. Her New York credits include *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Elvis is Dead*, and various original works with the Weird Sisters writing group. **Camilla Ross** (Mrs. Muller) is the current president of the Emerson Theater Collaborative, drawing on over 20 years of theatrical experience, ranging from commercials to regional theater. She is the theatrical advisor and acting coach for the SPAG Players at Three Rivers Community College in Norwich, CT. She sings with the Connecticut Lyric Opera of New London, and was seen locally in *The Laramie Project*, directed by Van Farrier. *Doubt* is being produced under a Special Appearance contract with Actors' Equity Association. Palzere-Rae, Sherman, and Harger are Equity actors.

Playwright **John Patrick Shanley** studied educational theater at N.Y.U. before making a name for himself as a writer with his first published play *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*. His big breakthrough came in 1987 with the screenplay for the romantic comedy *Moonstruck*, which won Shanley his first Oscar for Best Original Screenplay. His other early screenplays include the episodic comedy *Five Corners* and the offbeat crime comedy *The January Man*. In 1990 he made his directorial debut by filming his script for *Joe Versus the Volcano*, starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. In 2005, he received the Pulitzer Prize, the Drama Desk Award, and the Tony Award for *Doubt*.

Doubt is directed by **Albert Cremin**. Mr. Cremin works regularly as an actor, singer, dancer, choreographer, director, producer, teacher, coach, and designer. As an acting company member of Plays for Living in NY, he has played many roles in their touring productions; stage managed, directed, and was production manager for a number of their tours. He made his professional debut in PA playing Felix in Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*. A veteran actor from Boston, he received his B.A. and M.A. in Theater Education

from Emerson College. He played the dual role of John/James in the New England premiere of Terrence McNally's *Love! Valour! Compassion!* for Speakeasy Stage, and portrayed Mendy in another McNally play, *The Lisbon Traviata* at Triangle Theatre Company.

Rev. Stacy E. F. Emerson of Union Baptist Church says of the project, "We are pleased to host the inaugural production of the Emerson Theater Collaborative. *Doubt* makes a significant comment on the power of suggestion and the subtle and possibly insidious effect it can have on self and others. Shanley's work is not only profound psychologically and spiritually but relevant to the ongoing life of churches and of our communities."

Key Dates and Information

What: Emerson Theatre Collaborative's inaugural production, *Doubt: A Parable*, by John Patrick Shanley

When: August 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23. All performances are at 8:00 p.m., except Sunday, August 17, which is at 4:00 p.m.

Where: Union Baptist Church, 119 High Street, Mystic CT

How: Tickets are \$18 (\$16 for students and seniors) and can be obtained by calling 860-705-9711. Proceeds will benefit Noank Baptist Group Homes, Inc., serving the youth of southeastern Connecticut. Additional information is available at EmersonTheatreCollaborative.org.

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